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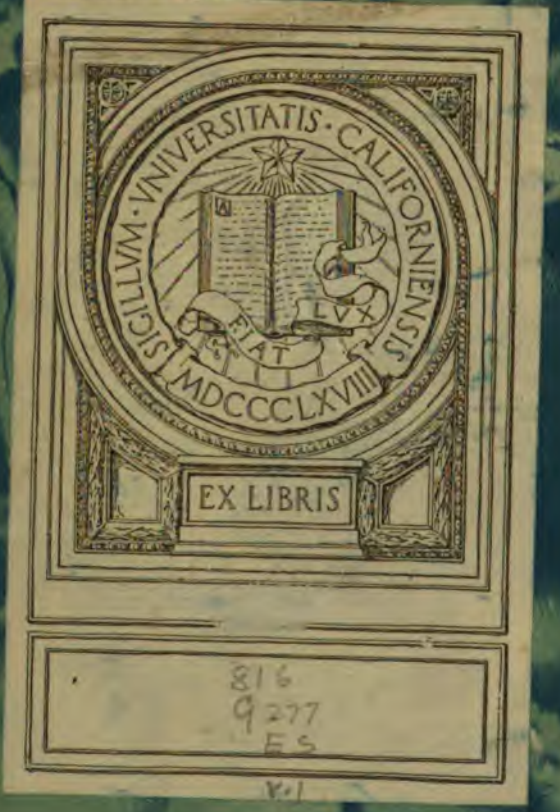

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Edition de Luxe

Mademoiselle De Maupin

PARTS I. AND II.

By

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

Translated and Edited by

PROFESSOR [illegible] C. DE SUMICHRAST

DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOLUME I.

The C. T. Brainard
Publishing Co.
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THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER was born at Tarbes, in the South of France, on August 30, 1811, — the year of the birth of that King of Rome who ended his days as Duke of Reichstadt at the Austrian court. The family of Gautier was of Southern origin, and came from Avignon, the city of the Popes. The father, a fanatical royalist, had married a tailor's daughter, named Adélaïde-Antoinette Cocard, whose eldest sister had wedded the Count of Poudens. Adélaïde was a remarkably beautiful woman, of a cold and haughty mien, but devoted to her son. Jean-Pierre Gautier, the father, was in the Internal Revenue service, and in 1814 removed to Paris, where nostalgia, one of the fundamental traits of the poet's temperament, speedily developed in the boy. Young Gautier never forgot the sunny South; he longed to return to it, and one day, hearing some soldiers speaking in the Gascon tongue,

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he begged them to take him back to the land of his birth.

At the age of five he read with ease and began to devour one book after another, beginning with "Robinson Crusoe," and passing through Florian's "Estelle et Némorin" to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's "Paul et Virginie," which, to the end, he esteemed a perfect masterpiece. The love of reading never left him; even dictionaries and encyclopædias had a charm for him.

He was doomed to the ordinary fate of the French boy whose parents are ambitious that he should succeed: life in a *collège*. The prison — it was nothing else in his case — was Louis-le-Grand, named after the illustrious monarch for whom Gautier uniformly professed the utmost contempt and detestation. Of a poetic nature, of an artistic temperament, exceedingly susceptible to the influence of his surroundings, dependent on affection and loving care, the lad, severed from his family, bound down by rigid rules, kept from that freedom which he had already learned to prize, was unutterably wretched. Fortunately for him, his father was a man who to wide reading and sound scholarship joined common-sense. Seeing the boy's unhappiness,

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he withdrew him from Louis-le-Grand and entered him as a day-pupil at Charlemagne, where, bar the jealousy excited by his success in study, his life was pleasanter. As he proceeded he manifested a distinct preference for the decadent writers, such as Martial, Petronius, and Apuleius, and a bent towards drawing and painting which clearly indicated his vocation.

Before he left the *lycée* he was already a pupil in Rioult's studio, where he had for comrades youths who to a man were fervent Romanticists and worshippers of the genius of Victor Hugo. The same influence was at work in his family; besides, his school friend, Gérard de Labrunie, better known as that Gérard de Nerval whose talents promised so brilliant a career and who ended so wretchedly, belonged heart and soul to the new school. Labrunie had early distinguished himself: at seventeen he had published a volume of verse, and his translation of "Faust" had brought him high praise from the great Goethe. He it was who presented Gautier to the master-poet, in that house of the rue Jean Goujon, which was soon to be abandoned for the historic mansion in the Place Royale. Hugo received the budding poet kindly, and advised him to publish the verses Labrunie had praised.

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From that day Hugo became to Gautier "the Real Presence of Poetry, as it were;" and when the famous 25th of February, 1830, came round shortly afterwards, Gautier was elected to be one of the squad leaders who were to direct the applause at the first performance of "Hernani," the drama on which, rightly enough, as events proved, the followers of Hugo built such high hopes. That first performance marks the great epoch of Gautier's life. It made upon him an ineffaceable impression; and although he broke away from the trammels of the school and asserted his own individuality, "Hernani" remained for him what it was to the youth of 1830, the most splendid creation of the French stage. When the play was revived in 1867, under the Second Empire — Hugo being then in exile and a bitter opponent of Napoleon III — Gautier wrote for the official *Moniteur* an enthusiastic and laudatory notice of the play, and put it, together with his resignation of the office of dramatic critic, before the Minister of the Interior. The article was accepted and published, and the resignation refused. The last work he was engaged upon was that "History of Romanticism" which has remained unfinished, and in which he describes, with a fire of enthusiasm that

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neither age nor suffering could extinguish, the story of that memorable first night, on which, wearing his rose-colored doublet and his lion mane of hair, he was the most conspicuous figure in the tumultuous scene. The last lines he penned were an article on "Hernani."

From this time his career was practically settled, and literature claimed him as her own with the publication of his first "Poems," on the 28th of July, 1830. An unfortunate date, for it was the first of those "glorious days of July" which overthrew the reactionary Charles X. and inaugurated the reign of Louis-Philippe, the *bourgeois* king.

Gautier had the ill-luck, or rather the lack of foresight, which marked also his admirers, the Goncourt brothers. Devoted to art like them and despising the *bourgeois*, — under which term, broadened for his own use, he classed all whosoever did not make of art an exclusive cult, — he was blind, or at least wholly indifferent to the signs of the times, and always failed to perceive coming revolutions until they had become accomplished facts. To this was due the failure of his first poetic effort to attract any attention whatever. Even worse than this — for Gautier was in no wise discouraged by this check — his father, an ardent believer

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in the monarchy, as has already been said, speculated on a rise in the funds and naturally lost his all; and thus began for the son that life-long struggle with ill-fortune which recalls that still more pathetic, still more trying one in which Balzac is the central figure. The revolution of 1848, which dethroned Louis-Philippe in his turn, found Gautier in fairly comfortable circumstances; it left him again a ruined man. He managed to pull up once more, and at the end of eighteen years was justified in believing that he would be appointed to the Imperial Senate, — a comfortable sinecure, — that the doors of the Academy would at last open to admit him, and that he might end his life in the fulfilment of a long caressed project, the founding of a school for the training of literary artists, — when the crash came at Sedan and the Empire fell.

But in 1830 he was young, full of energy and high hopes, and determined to cut his way to the front. His first long poem, "Albertus," appeared in 1832 and won him fame. It was of the Romantic order and stamped its author as one of the brilliant minds of that ever-increasing company of devotees to art in all its forms whose cardinal principle was the lauding of each other's works and the faithful imitation of the manner-

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isms of Victor Hugo, then the recognised standard-bearer of the school.

Gautier, however, like Musset, had a strongly marked individuality and a keen sense of the humorous. He perceived readily the ridiculous side of Romanticism; the more so that he himself had gone to the fullest extremes in the extravagance and nonsense that then passed as a mark of genius, or of great talent at least. Just as Musset, in his audacious "Ballad to the Moon," in his "Mardoche," and in many parts of his "Namouna," had satirised the excesses of the school, so Gautier relieved himself by the composition and publication of the tales which bear the collective name of "les Jeune-France." The work was a great success, acclaimed on the one hand by the Romanticists, most of whom were not quick-witted enough to perceive the sarcasm dealt out to them, and most heartily damned, on the other, by the pale-faced *bourgeois*, who were treated in it with that total disrespect and that exasperating contempt which the adherents of Hugo openly and loudly professed for them.

Youth loves to make a sensation. Gautier enjoyed the noisy reputation he had so easily gained, as did also Eugène Renduel, the publisher of the Romanticists,

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who begged him for another work, a sensational novel. He got it, though it took three years to write. It was "Mademoiselle de Maupin," which called out, on its appearance, a storm of mingled reprobation and admiration, provoked then mainly by the Preface, later by the story itself, and the echoes of which have not altogether died out in our day. In those debonair times, when Realists and Naturalists had not yet appeared upon the scene and served up "slices of life" to a public whose vitiated taste refuses all but the gamiest and most highly seasoned works of an epoch of decadence, the book was looked upon as a shameless exposition of sensuality by some, as a masterpiece of art and audacity by others. The brilliant "Preface," with its virulently sarcastic attacks upon critics and the old-maidish prudery of the *bourgeois*, was, however, the chief offence, the story itself attracting little attention outside the sacred circle.

It was at this time that he became connected with the *Chronique de Paris*, founded by Balzac, and in which he published several tales, "Death in Love" and "The Golden Chain" being the most noteworthy. The tale which now bears the title of "Fortunio," and which is one of his best-known works, belongs also to this period. It appeared in book form in

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1838, the year in which Gautier gave to the public a second serious effort in verse, "The Comedy of Death," with which ended both his youth and his career as a Romanticist; for he who had flouted and jeered at the press, who had poured out such a torrent of vituperation and sarcasm upon newspapers and journalists, had been drawn into the vortex of daily-newspaperdom, and had himself become one of the despised tribe, shut up within that "dog-kennel" at the bottom of the first page of the paper yclept the *feuilleton*. He was now to bid adieu to poesy and the freedom of fancy —

> "I have for times unknown, on the altar of my soul,
> Overset the golden urn, whence flamed the fire:
> For me spring is no more, nor art, nor sleep."

It was in 1836 that he became a member of the staff of the *Presse*, Émile de Girardin's paper, and that he entered upon that long and laborious career to which death alone put an end thirty-six years later. For more than half that time he furnished his journal with the brilliant articles in art and the drama which made his name a household word wherever French was spoken or read. In 1855 he transferred

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his invaluable services to the *Moniteur Officiel* and when this sheet was replaced by the *Journal Officiel*, he remained on the latter till the day of his death.

The monotony of his task, the strain of the daily supply of copy, were relieved and brightened at times by travel, which gave Gautier the opportunity of creating a new literary *genre*, in which he has no equal. In 1840 he went to Spain, and his eyes were opened as they never yet had been. He was at home in that land of history and romance; he breathed more freely; he felt himself amid congenial surroundings; and the book which he wrote, "Tras los Montes," better known as "Travels in Spain," is a masterpiece Five years later he went to Algeria, and between 1850 and 1852 he visited Italy, Constantinople, and Greece. Later still, in 1860, he travelled through Russia, and added to his already splendid reputation by the works in which he told of his wanderings through the realms of the White Czar, the home of the Turk, and the land of the Cæsars.

In 1861 the *Revue Nationale* began the publication of a novel which had first been announced in 1836, by Renduel: "Captain Fracasse." The book took a long time to write, but once the publication was begun,

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Gautier laboured at it steadily, forced to this by the necessity of furnishing regular instalments to the printer; and these successive instalments appeared until the completion of the work in 1863.

In 1859, two years before the publication of the first instalment of "Captain Fracasse," many of his dramatic criticisms were collected and appeared in book form under the title "History of the Drama." In 1867 he was asked to collaborate in the composition of the joint report upon the approaching exhibition, and the task assigned him was "The Progress of French Poetry since 1830." In 1872, the year of his death, — he passed away on the 23rd of October, — he was engaged upon the "History of Romanticism" which he left unfinished. Two posthumous works must be added to this list: the "Portraits and Recollections of Literary Men," which came out in 1877 and consist of a number of literary criticisms of great interest and value; and "The East," composed partly of the account of his experiences in Algeria, partly of descriptions of the Oriental section of the Exhibition.

Gautier was one of the most prolific and indefatigable writers of a century which has known Victor Hugo, Balzac, and George Sand. He himself esti-

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mated that his collected works would fill three hundred volumes.

Two causes contributed to this amazing power of production: an excellent physical constitution, and a prodigious erudition backed up by an equally wonderful memory. Physically Gautier was leonine in appearance, strikingly handsome, with long hair falling down upon his shoulders. Of an olive complexion without a trace of colour, dark, luminous eyes, his was a face that at once attracted attention. When young he had — an exception among the youth of his day in France — applied himself with remarkable persistency to athletics, and had developed into a man of exceptional strength, not only as tested on the dynamometer, but, better, in practice. He was known to have carried two men at arm's-length round a room, to have stopped a pair of runaway horses by seizing them by the nostrils; he was a powerful swimmer and had swum from Marseilles to the Castle of If and back. When the disease of the heart which proved mortal struck him down, that cherished strength suddenly left him, and he never got over the feeling of desperate regret which this loss entailed. In ordinary health he was endowed with an incredible

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appetite, that could rarely be fully appeased. He never ate bread, which he called a stupid and dangerous Western invention, due to the hated *bourgeois*, and productive of revolutions. He never drank during a meal, but when he had finished eating he swallowed three or four glasses of wine and then turned to his beloved cigar. An indefatigable worker, he allowed no day to pass without reading and writing; even on his travels he kept up the supply of "copy" called for by the insatiable press, to which he had become a slave.

His erudition was the fruit of his incessant and multifarious study, and it was well served by a memory wholly out of the common. His biographer and son-in-law, Émile Bergerat, gives more than one instance of this amazing power, and other intimate friends have borne witness to it. One reading of a poem sufficed to fix the lines in Gautier's memory; a fact once acquired remained his forever. He drew with singular quickness and accuracy on his stores of knowledge, and he was never, it is said, at fault. Of modern writers, Goethe alone can be compared to him in this respect.

The dominating trait in Gautier's make-up is the love, the worship of Beauty. "I have spent my life,"

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he said once, "in seeking Beauty under all its Protean forms in order to depict it." In a letter to Sainte-Beuve, dated October 12, 1857, he writes: "Yes, we believed in, we loved, we admired, we were intoxicated with beauty; we experienced the sublime craze of art." His first great novel, "Mademoiselle de Maupin," is, at bottom, a Hymn to Beauty; his earlier poems, as well as the matured and polished verse of "Enamels and Cameos," are full of that engrossing thought; his "Travels" are marked by a penetrating sense of the beautiful in landscape and in architecture; his art criticisms are revelations of the glory of beauty. It is his deity, his one real, deep love, to which he was never for an instant unfaithful. He was the more attached to it that the modern world loves it less; that in the civilisation of the nineteenth century it has comparatively little place, and frequently suffers an "obscene eclipse;" that science and industry have rudely pushed it aside; that morality and philosophy have set up other ideals for men to strive after. For there is a limitation to Gautier's conception: it is purely external, purely plastic beauty, or at most that which affects the senses chiefly, and not the higher and more wondrous type which is spiritual

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and ennobling. The broader conception which the contemplation of works of art or of nature is apt to excite in cultured minds, naturally predisposed to the worship of the beautiful, is but infrequently found in him. The outer form suffices for Gautier, — the sweetness of the sound, the languor of the harmony. His thought does not, as a rule, travel into the far beyond, plunge into immeasurable depths, or rise to unimagined heights.

The moral side of life and art does not affect him. He is not immoral, but unmoral. To virtue as such, he is profoundly indifferent, and vice troubles him not. What exists, exists, and he will never attempt to change or reform conditions. They may be, and often are, unpleasant, repellent — he leaves them as he finds them and takes refuge in his cult. Man delights him not, nor woman either. Humanity is a blot on creation; only now and then nowadays does one come upon a nobly formed man, a passingly beautiful woman. The man may be a Caligula, a Vitellius; that is no concern of Gautier's, he admires the form, the outward aspect. The woman may be a Messalina, a Borgia, — he cares nothing for her character and joyously adores her splendid beauty. Victor Hugo strove

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to make his readers admire and love criminals of the blackest type by giving to a Lucrezia, to a Triboulet, some high moral sentiment that redeemed them — in his opinion, at least; but such a preoccupation is wholly foreign to Gautier's nature, and his Mademoiselle de Maupin, his Nyssa, his Cleopatra, though not criminal in quite the same sense, have no feelings, no ideals on which to found a claim to our respect or even to our sympathy or our pity. Beauty is above all this; it is indifferent to vice and virtue; it exists independently of them. Virtue may be acquired; vice may be indulged in; learning is to be had in return for study; a man may compel himself to be moral; a woman may buy accomplishments; but beauty is the one thing absolutely beyond the reach of those who have it not.

Such a conception may not unjustly be termed sensual, and the charge of sensuality was time and again brought against Gautier during his lifetime, his famous novel being the chief gravamen in this respect, with "Albertus" a good second. But Gautier's sensuality does not spring from a love of the gross, of the carnal, and it is a mistake to read these two works, for instance, in that light. His sensuality is the natural, the logical consequence of his love of plastic beauty;

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he is a man of the Renaissance, a pagan of the age of Pericles, not an ascetic of the days of Saint Jerome, or a Puritan of the time of Milton. He abhors asceticism because it disfigures human beauty, infrequent enough as it is; spirituality alone does not affect him if it be not expressed by the pure oval of the face, the half-parted lips, and the tear-wet, upturned blue or black eyes. It is always the external he returns to, and the outer form that he loves. He is as much moved in his artistic being by the outlines of the hills against the sunset sky, by the simple, deep beauty of the Parthenon, by the magic splendour of the Alhambra, by the Madonnas of Raphael, the portraits of Titian, or the landscapes of Claude Lorrain as by the fairest bosom or the shapeliest limbs. Whatever bears the imprint of beauty appeals to him, and he will enjoy to the full a rare piece of carving or of metal work as he will the glance of a lovely eye or the set of a graceful head. His sensuality is that of the artist, of the painter, of the poet; not that of the voluptuary.

If confirmation of this view be required, it is found in his opinion of woman, and in his definition of poetry. The former was analogous to Vigny's, and he was convinced that feminine influence was pernicious and

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debilitating. Nor did he have a much higher idea of woman physically. "I have always," he wrote in 1867, "preferred a statue to a woman, and marble to flesh." And when he speaks of poetry, he defines it as "radiant words, luminous words — with rhythm and music." "Mademoiselle de Maupin" emphasises strongly the abstract conception which swayed him, while Leconte de Lisle's lines on "sacred beauty" happily express Gautier's belief: —

> "It alone survives, immovable, eternal.
> Death may scatter the quaking worlds,
> But beauty still flames; through her all revives,
> And these worlds yet under her white feet spin."

Three Frenchmen in our time have possessed a remarkable power of vision: Victor Hugo, Balzac, and Gautier. But each sees in different fashion. Hugo's glance, attracted by or fortuitously falling upon an object, transforms it, enlarges it to abnormal proportions, while his vivid imagination, at once awakened, passes with incredible swiftness from one image to another, the suggestion being often so rapid that links in the series of figures disappear, are dropped and lost, to the bewilderment of the ordinary reader; Balzac sees bit by bit, and by heaping up detail makes his impression

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upon the reader; but Gautier has the true artist's eye and not only sees the face, the figure, the outline, the monument, or the landscape, as it actually is, but unerringly puts before his readers, not a description, as Balzac, nor a transfiguration or deformation, as Hugo, but the object itself, so vividly and so accurately that a photograph would be far less true to the original. Sainte-Beuve lays great stress on this important element of Gautier's talent: "As regards the physical appearance, he has left nothing unsaid; he makes you know the cities, the climate; he makes you touch and handle the light." Gautier's books of travel are unlike those of any of his predecessors. Chateaubriand had attained splendid results in his "Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem," but he mingled sentimentalism and psychological reflections with his descriptions, and while far in advance of any eighteenth-century traveller, did not always give an exact impression. Mme. de Staël's lack of feeling for nature disqualified her in great measure for the task of reproducing scenery in words; Lamartine idealised overmuch; and Hugo exaggerated and indulged in antithesis to an extent that often mars the picturesque effect. Gautier is true; he eliminates his own personality; his object is to render accurately, and he

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never fails to do so. His "Travels in Spain" marked the creation of a new and valuable literary *genre*, and writers of travels had henceforth to walk in his steps.

The same quality, the same power is found in his art criticisms. A painter himself, familiar with all the technicalities and secrets of the profession, keenly sensitive to colour and form, he treated the description of pictures in a manner at once new and strikingly happy. He reproduces the picture; he makes it absolutely visible to the reader, and in his way of doing this he imparts, in most subtile manner, his opinion of the work, his judgment upon the artist. He differentiates his words, his expressions, his turns so that he communicates the feeling aroused by the original; the very tone of the painting, the very scale of the colours is borne in upon one. "In his articles," says again Sainte-Beuve, "it is lines and colours he makes use of, not ink; he works with pencil and palette." He is not a slasher nor a sneerer; not an excitable enthusiast nor an injudicious admirer. Benevolent, gentle, indulgent almost to a fault, he has a reason for what he says, and if he cannot laud the work he will not damn it with faint praise, but honestly point out what there is worthy of attention in it and what had best be neglected.

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His task was harder when it came to dramatic criticism: tragedy, comic opera, vaudeville — Gallio cared for none of those things, and yet the plays must be written about and an opinion expressed. What he really loved was the romantic drama, the ideal romantic drama, full of fantasy and poesy, of splendour and imagination, of costume and scenery. He longed for an external show of the kind to which certain impresarii of the present day are so partial, and which makes the spectator forget Shakespeare in the magnificence of the stage-setting and the archæological accuracy of the costumes and the properties. "The drama I love is the fantastic, extravagant, impossible drama, which the worthy public would pitilessly hiss from the very first scene because it is incapable of understanding a word of it." This explains his dislike of the works of Racine and the greater tragedies of Corneille, which depend for their interest on the study of the passions, on the truthful analysis of the human heart, on the conflict of characters. They offer little or no hold to externals, so dear to Gautier, and therefore the performances of Rachel and the attempts of Ponsard failed to charm him. A play such as Rostand's "Romanesques" or "Cyrano de Bergerac" would have delighted the

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poetic dramatist who revelled in the composition of exquisite ballets. The modern drama, especially that which claimed to serve up "slices of life" disgusted him. "They call it physiology, but it ought to be pathology. Poetry in drama, which is the very drama itself, is being killed by that fashion of dissecting the soul as if it were a cadaver. . . . Molière, behind whom you shelter yourselves, gives the impression of life, but life itself never. It is too ugly; he knows it, and is on his guard."

Yet he was compelled to attend the performances of plays which in their principle and their details were repugnant to him; compelled to criticise them, to tell the public what they were, while feeling the pulse of that public so that he himself should not allow his personal preferences to run counter too frequently or too plainly to the popular taste. No wonder the task was repugnant and stimulated the longing he so often expressed, especially during the later years of his life, for the possession of a small independence which would free him from the accursed necessity of furnishing copy day after day on subjects that were uncongenial, and which would enable him to return to his well-beloved verse-making, and thus liberate the "poet con-

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demned to hard labour for life." There is something very pathetic in the sight of Gautier labouring at his task and now and then turning to gaze at that ideal of Poesy and Beauty he ever loved, and from which he was kept by the stern necessity of making a livelihood for his family and himself.

Some consolation, some alleviation was furnished by another component of his character. Eastern blood flowed in his veins, and heredity had transmitted to him some of the characteristics of the Eastern soul. He had not merely a touch of the superstition of the Greek of old and much of that of the dweller in mediæval times; he bore also within him the mysterious longings and vague beliefs of the Oriental. Alphonse Daudet early acquired a habit of putting himself in the place of people he met and imagining their life, but Gautier's desire was more intense; he wished to *be* some one else. As he makes d'Albert say, in "Mademoiselle de Maupin," he wished to be a woman, if but for a day; at another time it was an Eastern potentate; at another, a Moor; at another, a man of the mediæval days or a Greek of the golden age. So far as lay within his power, he effected avatars; he was a Russian in Moscow, a Turk in Constanti-

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nople, a hidalgo in Spain, at Rome a cardinal. "As soon as I set foot in a country," he remarked, "I become a native of it; I wear the national dress, if possible, as I did in Spain, for I have the gift of at once acquiring the manner of life."

From the recollections of his travels, from his power of transforming himself into the hero of fable, the princess of romance, the rajah of the East, he drew wherewithal to temper the commonplace routine of newspaper work and to satisfy, in some measure, the need for the play of fancy and the freedom of action and thought. To project himself into other lands, known or unknown, to live other lives, to pass through splendours lavishly outspread on all sides, to indulge the rich fancy which the Romantic influence on his earlier life had stimulated and developed, deadened somewhat the infinite nostalgia of other climes and other days from which he always suffered. He thus escaped from the ugliness of the world around him, the unpicturesqueness of modern civilisation, the lack of colour and glow, of music and sonority which his artistic temperament craved. Like Flaubert he fled from the hated *bourgeois* and coarse, crude realism into the evocations of the past which uprose before him in splendid beauty at the

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bidding of his will and the touch of his imagination. The Stoic indifference, largely assumed no doubt, which gives to his work much of that impassibility which Leconte de Lisle so carefully cultivated; the willed detachment from things of ordinary life and the current interests of the day, were due in great part to the feeling that, as he could not alter the world in which he lived, the best thing was to ignore it.

Another cause was the *blasé* feeling which is marked in him even in youth, and to which he has given repeated expression in the confidences of d'Albert to his friend. The ordinary world was stale to him; hence that affection not only for the writers of the Latin decadence, but for those of the eighteenth century and their earlier compeers of the nineteenth. The refinement and love of delicate, bizarre beauty which blooms in much of his later verse, the delight in the polishing and re-polishing, in the cutting and faceting of the lines, in the preference for certain words, in the odd satisfaction which he derived from misspelling, all this was a part of his nature which tended to draw him away from the commonplace, and also, it must be confessed, from the broader and more vigorous sides of literature. It inevitably tended to separate him from the larger public,

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and would have wholly done so — much as was the case, from a different cause, with Vigny before him and Leconte de Lisle after him — but for the compulsion under which he worked, the necessity which lay upon him to keep in touch with the readers of his paper.

While Gautier rebelled against this obligation, while the sense of it was a torture to him, nevertheless it worked to his good. That impassibility which he cultivated, that exclusive devotion to art which would otherwise have mastered him, were justly tempered, and the writer in him benefited, by the forced contact with humanity from which he would gladly have escaped. While his influence upon later poets is considerable — both as regards pure love of art for art's sake and the importance of the technical side of the work — his influence on the general public has also been large and beneficial. More than Hugo he trained many to the appreciation of beautiful form and exquisite colour, both in verse and prose. The sense of proportion, fortified in him by his visit to Greece and his loving penetration of the divine beauty of old Greek art, was a needed corrective to the extravagances of the Romantic school, a corrective the more valuable that it was evolutionary and not reactionary. The mass of readers

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who day after day perused in the *Moniteur* or the *Journal Officiel* the articles on drama, literature, and art, were insensibly trained to a truer perception of beauty and a clearer appreciation of its innumerable manifestations. The stately grandeur, the marmorean beauty of Leconte de Lisle's verse are unknown to many even now; the impassibility, the culture, the pessimism of the poet react against him and separate him from the knowledge and admiration of the general public. Gautier's "Enamels and Cameos" are better known than the "Poems of Antiquity," and the "Travels in Spain" than the "Erinnyes." But they would have been as little read and as little understood of the profane had not the newspaper laid its heavy hand on Gautier's genius and forced him to retain some relationship with the great mass of readers.

Gautier has given the world some of the very best of the Romantic literature it possesses; books of travel unsurpassed for their accuracy, their picturesqueness, their force of impression; novels and tales whose attraction grows instead of lessening; poems containing some of the richest verse in the French tongue; criticisms of art that realise the ideal of being written by a painter who is also a master-writer; portraits of con-

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temporaries, and studies of authors which make us know the men intimately. He has shown equally with Hugo, even more, perhaps, than Hugo, the wealth of the French vocabulary and the marvellous sonority and colour of its vocables; he has united in a rare degree the romantic and the classic in his writings; he has taught a younger generation the value of technique and handiwork; he has held aloft the ideal of pure beauty; he is an incomparable word-painter, a fecund author, an ever-interesting companion, and is justly placed among the classics of France and among those men who should have been members of the French Academy and were not, — to the loss of that body and not to their own.

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Mademoiselle De Maupin

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MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

Introduction

NOT milk for babes nor a book for young men or maidens, undoubtedly; composed by a youth who forgot or contemned the "maxima reverentia;" a work of art, a hymn to plastic beauty, an outburst of Romanticism, a literary escapade comparable in some respects to portions of Byron's work, recalling passages of Shelley, lines of Keats, and, still more, the daring stanzas of Alfred de Musset in "Mardoche" and "Namouna," and some of the exquisite strains of "Rollo" and the "Nuits."

Written to the order of Renduel, who desired a sensational novel, the book failed, save for its audaciously impertinent Preface, to fulfil the publisher's expectations, and it did not create as much of a stir as the ghoulish "Han d'Islande," the absurd novels of Petrus Borel, or the brilliant stories of Dumas the

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elder. It was too poetical for the average reader of that day, and the sensuality which marks it was not gross enough for that class of prurient persons who seek and invariably find nastiness where others fail to discover it. Yet the novel exemplifies in a striking manner several of the important traits of Romanticism in France, and indicates the tendencies of a movement the full consequences of which have been clearly perceived in our day only.

Though partly based upon fact, "Mademoiselle de Maupin" is largely a work of pure imagination and fancy. It is a day-dream, related in wondrous language, depicted in occasional tableaux, made tangible and almost real by the great skill of the writer. It is partly, also, a mental autobiography, for many of the sentiments attributed to d'Albert are unquestionably the sentiments of Gautier himself. The yearning for a full realisation of beauty, the distaste for the commonplace, the longing for the unattainable, the feeling of disappointment, the disgust of satiety experienced with the first taste of pleasure, these are all found in the author himself, and so far d'Albert is to Gautier what René is to Chateaubriand — but so far only. Add to this sentimental need of putting himself into the

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skin of his male personage the devouring desire to experience what women feel, what different beings feel, not nowadays only, but also in other days, a desire which was ever present in Gautier, and the choice of the subject becomes more intelligible. Gautier would have delighted in leading many lives, not in fancy merely, but actually. Could he have gone beyond the bounds of metempsychosis and become a passionate, an amorous, a voluptuous woman, such as the one he depicts in his heroine, his soul would have been satisfied. Could he have lived the real life of an Eastern potentate, rich beyond the dreams of avarice, steeped in all the pleasure of the Orient, he would have breathed a sigh of contentment. Could he have become a god and known the fulness of beauty and expressed it, made it tangible, he would have felt that life was well lived and annihilation cheap at the price. But none of these things could he do, though he remained a prey to the burning desire, and therefore in the composition of "Mademoiselle de Maupin" he strove to realise something of the avatar he dreamed of.

The book is not a product of Christian art, in the ordinary sense of the word, and Chateaubriand himself would have been puzzled — had it been written in his

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day — to relate it to Christian inspiration, yet the influence of that art is not wholly absent from it; its paganism, in which the Greek love of beauty, that refreshed and revived art in France at the time of the Renaissance, is felt, drew to itself some part of the spiritual beauty which Christianity called out in the religious paintings of the great masters of Italy and Spain. But Gautier is, nevertheless, essentially a pagan, to whom the art of the Middle Ages appeals but imperfectly, his own nature not being spiritual. The times, the circumstances in which he lived and which affected the earlier development of his talent, made some mark upon his work; the real influence to which he sympathetically responded was that which inspired the Greek of old and the artist of the Renaissance, — the love of external beauty, the sensuous delight in the perfection of form and the glory of colour, the splendour of rich stuffs, and the gleam of jewels.

Romanticism laid much stress on externals, and in so far Gautier was in touch with it, as the perusal of the novel readily shows. It acted on him, however, and on his work in another way, producing results more markedly distinctive. He has no thought of or care for analysis of character. There is not a single strong

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character in the book, no living creation, no type that has passed into the domain of literature. D'Albert is weak, and to a large extent unattractive. His constant self-torture is apt to weary, as does that of the Romantic hero. He has no will of his own, no manly vigour. The heroine, for all her strangeness, her boldness, and her assumption of masculine dress, is simply a characterless creature. Now this is the badge of the whole tribe of Romantic heroes and heroines. They are not living human beings; they are merely creations of the fancy, and mouthpieces of the author. They are figures dressed in rich or picturesque costumes; they strike attitudes, they pose, they affect certain expressions, they knit their brows and frown, they scowl, they turn their eyes to heaven, they swoon, they rage, but they are not real; they do not convey the idea of actuality. And this is emphatically the case with d'Albert and Theodore. They are shadows evoked by Gautier, — brilliant, striking, fair to look upon, but shadows that melt into thin air, substanceless, unreal.

Again, Romantic writers, for all their fine phrases about woman, for all the adornments which they bestowed upon her and the languorous and amorous verse they spouted about her, had but a low opinion of the sex,

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and considered her, when all is said and done, as merely a charming ornament, a pretty plaything intended to satisfy man's sensual desires. In all Victor Hugo's dramas there is not one woman who commands admiration and respect, and he is the chief and leader of the school. As is the master, so are the disciples. In "Mademoiselle de Maupin" Gautier takes no pains to conceal his low view of woman; not that he thinks it low; he merely expresses what he, in common with the other Romanticists of the day, felt and believed. Vigny, at least, honours woman more by presenting her to us as an active principle of evil which man has to combat. She is not a nonentity; she is impure, it is true, in body and soul, but she is a power. Lamartine has idealised her, etherealised her to the extent of making her a phantom of delight, but *not* "a perfect woman, nobly planned, to warm, to comfort, and command." Hogg's Kilmeny that "gaed up the glen" is superior as a spiritual, yet human, creation to any French heroine of the Romantic period.

The curious obliquity which made the courtesan, the Messalina, a favourite with the French Romanticists has given us Hugo's Marion Delorme, Lucrezia Borgia, and Tisbe, Dumas's Adèle d'Hervey, and Gautier's Rosette

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and Mademoiselle de Maupin. The rehabilitation of virtue by the journalists of his day, against which the latter declaims in his Preface, was the counterpart of the rehabilitation of immorality in woman, in which the Romanticists especially delighted. Gautier asks nothing of woman but beauty, perfect beauty. As to the moral side of her nature, he cares not a jot for it, and it is, consequently, wholly absent from this novel.

Another trait, the disdain of the vulgar, the contempt for the public, while not confined to the members of the Romantic school, is nevertheless characteristic of it and crops up constantly in "Mademoiselle de Maupin." Gautier abhors the *bourgeois* and cannot chaff, cannot abuse him too much. He takes pleasure in scandalising him, in horrifying him, in making him shudder, in shocking him. Hence many of the more risky situations, many of the more lascivious passages of the novel. He enjoyed writing them, because the young animal in him was hot-blooded and its passions highly excited, but very largely, too, because primness, prudery, conventional morality would be stirred up to impotent protestation. Much of the same sort of thing is to be met with in Musset, the most adorably impertinent contemner of the *profanum vulgus*. In this there was,

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further, the element of the disdain of youth for age, so very marked in all the Romanticist writers of the flamboyant group, — a disdain which went, in Gautier and at that time, to the length of abhorrence. Old age was repulsive to him, and he joyed in the confounding of it by youth, as did the valets of Molière who befooled and beat the Gérontes, or the Crispins of Regnard who personated in order to rob them.

But after all, the main inspiration of "Mademoiselle de Maupin" is the love of beauty, the passionate desire for the perfection of loveliness. Gautier dwells on this aspect of his subject; Rosette and Theodore are but pretexts for lyrical strains in praise of his idol, but pegs on which to hang votive offerings of garlands of Poesy to it. Hence the transformation of the original subject-matter, which he found in the life of the adventuress and Opera singer whose name he has given to his heroine, and whose adventures and temperament he has borne in mind while tracing the portrait of Theodore. This woman was a Mademoiselle d'Aubigny, whose father was secretary to the Count d'Armagnac, and was born in 1673. When quite young she was married to an insignificant fellow of the name of Maupin, who soon dropped out of her life to reappear only towards

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its close. He spent his days in the provinces, as a clerk or subordinate official in the Treasury Department. The girl herself early left him to seek adventures in the gay world of Paris, where she became the mistress of a fencing-master, Seranne, under whom she acquired remarkable skill in the use of the small sword. The pair went to the South of France, and finding themselves impecunious, turned to account their natural gift of a fine voice, Maupin possessing a splendid contralto. She made her début as a singer on the Marseilles stage, and at once scored a success. A discreditable adventure with a young girl of that city, involving the digging-up of the body of a dead nun and the setting fire to the convent in which Maupin was masquerading as a novice, brought down upon her the arm of the law, but no particular effort appears to have been made to carry out the sentence passed upon her. She adopted thereafter the practice of dressing in men's clothes, and in her assumed character fought many a duel, out of which she invariably came victorious.

Returning to Paris she was presented by the composer Bouvard to Francine, Lulli's successor in the management of the Opera, and under his auspices she made her first appearance on the Paris stage in the part

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of Pallas in the opera of "Cadmus." Here again she won success and speedily became a *prima donna*. She is described by a contemporary as being at this time a most beautiful woman, of medium stature, with a very fine figure, brown hair, great blue eyes, an aquiline nose a well shaped mouth, remarkably fine teeth, and perfect neck and shoulders. From Paris, where her adventures were numerous and noisy, she went to Brussels and became the mistress of the Elector of Bavaria. When he cast her off she again returned to the capital and resumed her relations with Count d'Albert, an officer of the King's household, who had been and became again her preferred lover. Not long afterwards she withdrew from the stage, was reconciled to her husband, and lived with him until her death, some say, — until she entered a convent, according to others.

Gautier has retained the name of d'Albert as well as that of Maupin, but in other respects has allowed himself the greatest latitude in dealing with the material at his command.

The book, when first published, had for sub-title "A Double Love," which, however, appears only in the original edition and in the reprint, published by Charpentier-Conquest in 1887. The original "Preface"

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differs in some slight respects from the text now published. These changes were made in 1845 for the first edition issued by Charpentier, and are of little importance, being mostly concessions to taste. The original edition, which appeared at the close of the year 1835, did not sell well, and Renduel, the publisher, refused to take any other work from Gautier. But from 1845, when Charpentier acquired the copyright, — Gautier was paid 1500 francs for the work, — it has sold at an average number of several thousand copies a year, and its popularity has never waned.

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Preface

ONE of the most comical traits of the glorious epoch in which it is our happy lot to live is unquestionably the rehabilitation of virtue which all our newspapers — no matter of what stripe, red, green, or tri-colour — have undertaken.

Unquestionably virtue is a very respectable thing, and we have not the least intention of being rude to the good and worthy lady, Heaven help us! — We are of opinion that her eyes beam quite brightly enough through her spectacles, that her stockings have no wrinkles to speak of, that she takes her pinch of snuff from her gold box with all possible grace, that her pet dog curtsies like a dancing master. We grant all that. We even grant that, taking her age into account, she is still comely enough, and that she carries off her years undeniably well. She is a very pleasant grandmother, but a grandmother. It seems to me natural to prefer to her, especially when one is twenty

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years old, some little trig immorality coquettish to a degree, easy going, her hair out of curl, her skirt short rather than long, with an ankle and a glance that draw the eye, a cheek somewhat aglow, a laugh on the lips, and her heart on her sleeve. The most monstrously virtuous journalists cannot possibly hold a different opinion, and, if they assert the contrary, it is very likely they do not think as they speak. To think one way and to write in another happens every day, especially to virtuous people.

I remember the sarcasms hurled before the Revolution (the Revolution of July, I mean) at the unfortunate and maidenlike Viscount Sosthenes de la Rochefoucauld, who lengthened the skirts of the ballet-dancers at the Opera, and with his patrician hands stuck a modesty-preserving plaster just below the waist of all statues. The Viscount Sosthenes de la Rochefoucauld has been left far behind. Modesty has been vastly improved upon since his day, and we indulge in refinements he would never have thought of.

For myself, as I am not in the habit of looking at certain parts of statues, I thought, as others did, the fig-leaf cut out by the scissors of the director of Fine Arts, the most ridiculous thing in the world. It seems

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that I am wrong and that the fig-leaf is a most meritorious institution.

I have been told — though so strange is the statement that I refused to credit it — that there are people who see nothing in Michael Angelo's fresco of the *Last Judgment*, but the group of libertine prelates, and who veil their faces as they lament the abomination of desolation!

These people know only the couplet of the adder in the romance of Rodriguez. If there be, in a book or a picture, any nudity, they go straight to it as a pig to filth, and take no account of the blooming flowers or of the fair golden fruits which hang everywhere.

I confess that I am not virtuous enough for that sort of thing. Dorine, the bold soubrette, may freely exhibit in my presence her swelling bosom; I shall certainly not pull out my handkerchief to cover those breasts one ought not to look at. I shall look at her bosom as at her face, and, if it be white and shapely, I shall like to look at it. But I shall not feel Elmira's dress to see if the stuff be soft, and I shall not devoutly press her against the edge of the table, as that "poor chap" Tartuffe did.

The great pretence of morality which reigns nowadays would be very funny, were it not very wearisome.

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Every *feuilleton* is turned into a pulpit, every newspaper writer into a preacher; the tonsure and the clerical collar alone are wanting. We are having nothing but rain and homilies, and the one and the others can be avoided only by taking a carriage to go out, and rereading Pantagruel between the bottle and the pipe.

Mercy on us! what excitement! what frenzy! What has bitten you? what has stung you? what the devil is the matter with you that you are yelling so loud, and what has poor Vice done to you that you are so angry with it, — Vice, which is so good-natured, so easy to get on with, and which merely wants to enjoy itself and not to bore others, if this be possible? Do to Vice as Serre did to the constable: kiss and have done. Believe me, you will be the better for it. Good Heavens! what would you do but for Vice, O ye preachers? You would be reduced to poverty no later than to-morrow, if men turned virtuous to-day. The theatres would close this very evening. Where would you find material for your article? No more Opera balls to fill your columns, — no more novels to dissect; for balls, novels, and plays are the very pomps of Satan, if our Holy Mother the Church is to be believed. The actress would dismiss the man who keeps

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her, and could no longer afford to pay you for praising her. Your papers would have no subscribers. People would read Saint Augustine, go to church, tell their beads. Very nice, no doubt, but you would not be the gainers. What would you do with your articles on the immorality of the age, if people were virtuous? You see that Vice is of some use after all.

But it is the fashion now to be virtuous and Christian; it is a way we have. A man affects to be a Saint Jerome as formerly to be a Don Juan; he cultivates pallor and emaciation; he wears his hair of an apostolic length; he walks with clasped hands and eyes bent on the ground. He tries to look as if butter would not melt in his mouth; he keeps a Bible open on his mantelpiece and hangs a crucifix and a sprig of box, blessed by the priest, above his bedstead; he eschews swearing; he smokes but little; he scarcely ever chews. Then he is a Christian; talks of the sacredness of art, of the artist's high mission, of the poetry of Catholicism, of de Lamennais, of the painters of the Angelic School, of the Council of Trent, of progressive humanity, and a thousand other fine things. Some mingle a small dose of republicanism with their religion; they are not the least peculiar. They couple

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Robespierre and Jesus-Christ in the jolliest way, and mix, with a seriousness worthy of all praise, the Acts of the Apostles and the decrees of the *sainted* Convention, — that is the regulation epithet. Others add, by way of final ingredient, a few of Saint-Simon's ideas. These are the finished variety; after them there is no more to be said. It is not possible for man to carry absurdity to greater lengths— *bas ultra metas*, etc. They are the Pillars of Hercules of the burlesque.

Thanks to the prevailing hypocrisy, Christianity is so much in vogue that neo-Christianity itself enjoys a certain amount of favour. It is said to reckon as many as one follower, including Mr. Drouineau.

An exceedingly curious variety of the journalist properly called moral is the journalist with a family of women.

This variety carries the susceptibility of modesty almost to the point of cannibalism.

Its method of working, simple and easy at first glance, is none the less most comical and highly diverting, and I think it worthy of being preserved for the benefit of posterity, — for our ultimate descendants, as the asses of our so-called Golden Age used to say.

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To begin with, in order to start as a journalist of this sort, a few trifling properties are needed as a preliminary, — two or three legitimate wives, a few mothers, as many sisters as possible, a complete assortment of daughters, and innumerable cousins. Next, any play or novel, pen, ink, paper, and a printer. An idea or two and a few subscribers might come in usefully, but with plenty of philosophy and the money of the stockholders these may be dispensed with.

When you have these things you can start out as a moral journalist. The two following recipes, suitably varied, suffice for the editorial work: —

Models of Virtuous Articles on a First Performance.

"After sanguinary literature, filthy literature; after the morgue and the penitentiary, the bedroom and the house of ill-fame; after the rags stained by murder, the rags soiled by debauch; after . . . etc. (according to need and space one may go on in this fashion for from six to fifty lines and more), — that is to be expected. This is the result of romantic excess and the forgetfulness of healthy doctrine; the stage has become a school of prostitution, into which one ventures to enter but hesitatingly with a respectable woman. You go to the theatre on the strength of an illustrious name, and you are compelled to withdraw at the third

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act with your daughter all upset and not knowing which way to look. Your wife conceals her blushes behind her fan; your sister, your cousin, etc." (The names of relatives may be diversified at will; it is sufficient that they should be feminine.)

Note — One of these journalists has carried morality to the point of declaring, "I shall not go to see that drama with my mistress." I admire that man; I love him; I bear him in my heart as Louis XVIII. bore all France in his; for he has had the most triumphant, the most pyramidal, the most startling, the most gigantic idea which has penetrated the brain of man in this blessed nineteenth century, in which so many and so funny ideas have come into men's heads.

The mode of reviewing a book is very expeditious and within reach of all minds: —

"If you intend to read this book, lock yourself up carefully in your own room; do not let it lie about on your table. If your wife or your daughter happened to open it she would be lost. This book is dangerous; it preaches vice. It might have had much success, perchance, in Crébillon's time, in houses of ill fame, at the select suppers of duchesses; but nowadays, when morals are purer, when the hand of the people has thrown down the rotten edifice of aristocracy, etc., etc., etc., that . . . that . . . that . . . there must be in

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every book an idea, an idea . . . why, a moral, a religious idea that . . . a lofty, a deep view which satisfies the needs of humanity; for it is most regrettable that young writers should sacrifice the holiest things to success, and should devote their meritorious talents to libidinous descriptions that would bring a blush to the cheek of a captain of dragoons" (the maidenliness of captains of dragoons is the finest discovery made for many a year since the discovery of America). "The novel we criticise recalls Theresa the Philosopher, Felicia, Gaffer Matthew, Grécourt's Tales."

The virtuous journalist is deeply versed in filthy novels; I should greatly like to know why.

It is appalling to reflect that in the world of newspaperdom there are many worthy artisans who have no other means of livelihood for themselves and the numerous family they employ than these two recipes.

I am apparently the most enormously immoral individual in Europe or elsewhere, for I see nothing more licentious in the novels and plays of to-day than in the novels and plays of a former time, and I can scarcely understand why the morals of our journalists have suddenly become so jansenistically prurient.

I do not believe that the simplest-minded journalist will venture to say that Pigault-Lebrun, Crébillon the

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younger, Louvet, Voisenon, Marmontel, and all other writers of novels and tales are not more immoral — since immorality is insisted upon — than the most outrageous and the freest productions of Messrs. So-and-So, whom I do not name, in order to spare their blushes.

A man would have to be perversely untruthful not to own it.

And let it not be objected that I have cited names little known. If I have not selected dazzling and splendid names, it is not because they would fail to confirm my statement by their great weight.

Voltaire's novels and tales are assuredly not, save so far as difference in merit goes, fitter to be given as prizes to the youngsters in our boarding-schools than are the immoral tales of our friend the Lycanthrope or even the moral tales of sugared Marmontel.

What do you find in the comedies of the great Molière? The holy institution of marriage (to speak like catechisms and journalists) derided and turned into ridicule in every scene.

The husband is old, ugly, and peevish; he wears his wig awry; his coat is old-fashioned; he carries a stick with a hooked head; his nose is filthy with snuff; he is short-legged; he has a corporation as big as the

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budget. He cannot speak distinctly, and talks nonsense; he acts as foolishly as he talks; he sees nothing, hears nothing; you can kiss his wife to his face; he has no idea of what that means, and so it goes on until he is plainly and duly made out a cuckold, to his own knowledge and that of the very much edified audience, which applauds loudly.

It is the most thorough-paced husbands in the audience who applaud most loudly.

In Molière, marriage bears the name of George Dandin or Sganarelle; adultery, that of Damis or Clitandre; there is no name too sweet or charming for it. The adulterer is always young, handsome, well-made, and a marquis at the very least. He comes in from the wings humming the latest *coranto;* he steps on to the stage in the most deliberate and victorious fashion; he scratches his ear with the rosy nail of his little finger, coquettishly stuck out; he combs out his handsome blond wig with his tortoise-shell comb; he resettles his voluminous trunk-lace; his doublet and trunk hose disappear under pointlaces and favours; his scarf is from the right makers, his gloves are perfumed with more delicate scent than benzoin and civet; his feathers have cost a louis apiece.

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What a flashing eye and what a peach-like cheek! What smiling lips and white teeth! What soft and well-washed hands.

When he speaks, it is only in madrigals and perfumed gallantries of the best *précieux* style and of the bravest air; he has read novels and knows poetry; he is valiant and ready to draw; he scatters gold with a lavish hand, — so Angelica, Agnes, and Isabella can scarce refrain from throwing themselves in his arms, well-bred and great ladies though they are; and so the husband is regularly betrayed in the fifth act, and is very lucky if it is not in the first.

That is how marriage is treated by Molière, one of the loftiest and most serious geniuses that have ever existed. Does any one believe there is anything stronger in the indictments of "Indiana" and "Valentine"?

Paternity is even less respected, if it were possible. Just see Orgon, Géronte, all the fathers, how they are robbed by their sons, beaten by their valets! How, without pity for their age, their avarice, their obstinacy, their imbecility are laid bare! What pleasantries and practical jokes at their expense! How they are hustled out of life, these poor old fellows who put off

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dying and who will not give up their money! How the tenacity of life of parents is talked of; what arguments against heredity; and how much more convincing all this is than are the declamations of a Saint-Simon!

A father is an ogre, an Argus, a jailer, a tyrant, of no use save to delay marriage during the space of three acts until the final recognition takes place. A father is the perfectly complete ridiculous husband. Sons never are ridiculous in Molière's plays, for Molière, like all authors of all times, paid his court to the rising generation at the expense of the older.

And the Scapins, with their capes striped Neapolitan fashion, their cap cocked on one ear, their feathers waving, are they not most pious and chaste individuals, fit subjects for canonisation? Penitentiaries are full of honest people who have not done one fourth of what they have done. The villanies of Tralph are peccadilloes in comparison with theirs. And what of the Lisettes, the Martons? Nice young females truly! The street-walkers are less shameless, less ready with libidinous reply. How cleverly they can smuggle you a note! — how well keep watch during a rendezvous! On my word, they are invaluable young women, ready to oblige and full of sage counsel.

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A nice company it is that lives and moves and has its being in these comedies and imbroglios! Befooled guardians, cuckold husbands, libertine maids, swindling valets, daughters crazed with love, debauched sons, adulterous wives. Are they not at least the peers of the young and handsome melancholy heroes, and of the poor, weak, oppressed, and passionate women in the dramas and novels of our popular writers?

In all this, bar the final dagger-thrust, the indispensable bowl of poison, the *dénouements* are as bright as the endings of fairy tales, and everybody, even the husband, is fully satisfied. In Molière, virtue is always kicked out and beaten; it is virtue which wears horns and is thrashed by Mascarille; it is but once that, towards the end of the play, morality puts in a brief appearance in the somewhat *bourgeois* incarnation of Loyal the constable.

It is not to take aught from Molière's glory that we have said all this. We are not crazy enough to attempt to shake this colossus of bronze with our puny arms. Our intention was merely to demonstrate to our pious newspaper writers, whom the new works of the Romantic school cause to shudder and shy, that the classics, the reading and imitation of which

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they daily recommend, greatly surpass these works in licentiousness and immorality.

To Molière we might easily join both Marivaux and La Fontaine, each of whom incarnates two opposite sides of the French mind, and Regnier and Rabelais and Marot and many more. But it is not our intention to deliver here, because we are discussing morality, a course on literature for the use of those virgins, our newspaper writers.

In my opinion there is no reason for making so much fuss over so slight a matter. We are fortunately no longer in the days of fair-haired Eve, and honestly, we cannot be as primitive and patriarchal as they were in the Ark. We are not little girls preparing for their first communion, and when we play at capping rimes we do not answer *tarte à la crême*. Our ignorance is pretty learned, and our virginity has long since vanished; these are things to be possessed once only, and do what we may we cannot again have them, for nothing is swifter than disappearing virginity and vanishing illusions.

And perhaps it is no great harm, after all, and the knowledge of all things may be preferable to the ignorance of all things. That is a question the discussion

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of which I leave to those who are more learned than I. What is certain is that the world has got beyond the stage at which one may affect modesty and maidenly shame, and I think that the world is too old a duffer to assume to be childish and maidenly without becoming ridiculous.

Since its marriage to civilisation society has forfeited its right to be ingenuous and prudish. There is a blush which beseems the bride as she is being bedded, which would be out of place on the morrow; for the young wife mayhap remembers no more what it is to be a girl, or, if she does remember it, it is very indecent, and seriously compromises the reputation of the husband.

When perchance I peruse one of those fine sermons which, in our public prints, have taken the place of literary criticism, I sometimes feel very remorseful and very apprehensive, for there lie on my conscience sundry broad jests, somewhat highly spiced, as may well be the case of a youth who is hot-blooded and high-spirited.

Compared with these Bossuets of the Café de Paris, these Bourdaloues of the dress circle at the Opera, or these penny-a-liner Catos who reprove our age so

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tartly, I own to being indeed the most awful scoundrel that ever trod this earth, and yet, Heaven knows, the enumeration of my sins, both mortal and venial, with the customary spaces and leads, would scarcely, even in the hands of the cleverest publisher, make more than one or two octavo volumes a day, which is not much for a man who has no idea of entering paradise in the next world, or of winning the Monthyon prize or of being crowned with roses for virginity in this.

Then when I recall that I have met under the table, and even elsewhere, a pretty good number of these paragons of virtue, I come to have a better opinion of myself, and I consider that, whatever my own defects may be, they have one which, in my opinion, is the greatest and the worst of all — hypocrisy.

I dare say that if we were to look closely we might find another little vice to be added to this one, but this little vice is so hideous that, candidly, I dare not name it. Come near, and I shall whisper its name in your ear: it is — envy.

Envy; nothing else.

Envy it is that crawls and meanders in and out of all these paternal homilies; careful though it is to

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conceal itself, from time to time you see glitter, above the metaphors and the rhetorical figures, its little flat, viper head. You catch it licking with its forked tongue its lips blue with venom; you hear it hissing softly under some insidious epithet.

I know that it is unbearably conceited to claim that people are envious of you, and that it is almost as sickening as a fop who brags of his successes. I am not braggart enough to fancy that I have enemies and that men are envious of me; that is a piece of luck which does not fall to every one's share, and it is probable that it will not fall to mine for a long while yet; therefore I shall speak out freely and without reserve, as one who is very much disinterested in this matter.

A thing which it is easy to prove to those who have any doubt about it is the natural antipathy of the critic towards the poet, — of the one who creates nothing towards him who creates something, — of the hornet towards the bee, — of the gelding towards the stallion.

A man turns critic only after he has become thoroughly convinced that he cannot be a poet. Before he comes down to the wretched business of looking after

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the overcoats, or of marker in a billiard-room or a tennis-court, he has long courted the Muse of Poetry, he has tried to ravish her, but he proved not vigorous enough for the task and fell, pale and panting, at the foot of the sacred mount.

I understand the critic's hatred. It is distressful to see another man sit down to the banquet to which one is not bidden, or lie with the woman who would have none of you. I pity from the bottom of my heart the poor eunuch who is compelled to witness the enjoyment of the Grand Seignior.

He is admitted into the most secret recesses of the Oda; he takes the sultanas to the bath; he sees, under the silvery water of the great reservoirs, the sheen of those fair forms streaming with pearls and smoother than agate; the most hidden beauties are unveiled before him. Why trouble about him? He is a eunuch. The sultan caresses his favourite in his presence, and kisses her luscious lips. A very awkward situation for him, in truth, in which he can scarce know which way to look.

It is the same with the critic who sees the poet wandering about the garden of Poesy with his nine lovely odalisques and lazily disport himself in the

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shade of the great green laurels. He finds it pretty difficult to keep from picking up the stones on the highway, to throw them at him and hit him behind his wall, if he be skilful enough to do it.

The critic who has produced nothing is a coward; he is like a priest courting a layman's wife; the layman can neither fight the priest nor seduce *his* wife.

I am of opinion that a history of the different methods of running down a book — no matter which — since a month ago down to the present day, would form a history at least as interesting as that of Tiglath-Pileser or Gemmagog who invented pointed shoes.

There exists matter enough for fifteen or sixteen folio volumes; but we shall take pity on the reader and confine ourselves to a few lines; in return for which blessing, we ask for more than eternal gratitude. At a very distant time, lost in the mist of ages — it is quite three weeks ago — the mediæval novel flourished in Paris and the suburbs. The blazoned surcoat was highly honoured; the Hennin head-dress was not looked down upon; party-coloured trunks were highly prized; daggers were priceless; pointed shoes adored as fetishes. Everywhere pointed arches, turrets, columns, stained-glass, cathedrals, and castles; everywhere damosels and

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young sirs, pages and varlets, beggars and mercenaries, brave knights and fierce lords; all of which things were certainly more innocent than children's games, and did no harm to any one.

The critic did not wait for the publication of the second novel to begin his work of depreciation. As soon as the first appeared he put on his camel-hair shirt, scattered a bushel of ashes upon his head, and, lifting up his voice in loud lamentation, called, —

"More Middle Ages! Nothing but Middle Ages! Who shall deliver me from the Middle Ages, from these Middle Ages which are not the Middle Ages at all? — Middle Ages of pasteboard and terra-cotta with nothing mediæval about them but their name. Oh! the barons of iron in their armour of steel, with their hearts of steel in their iron breasts! Oh! the cathedrals with ever-blooming rose-windows, flowering stained-glass, with granite lace-work, and open-work trefoils, their serrated gables, and chasuble of stone embroidered like a bridal veil, with their tapers and chants, splendidly vested priests and kneeling congregations, deep, tremulous notes of organs, and angels hovering under the arches against which flutter their wings! How they have spoiled the Middle Ages for

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me, — my exquisite and richly coloured Middle Ages! They have plastered them over with coarse whitewash and crude colourings! Ah! ye ignorant daubers who fancy you are colourists because you have stuck red on blue, white on black, red on green, you have seen but the outer pellicle of the Middle Ages, you have not discovered their spirit, no blood flows in the epidermis with which you have clothed your phantoms, no heart beats beneath the steel corslets, no legs fill the cotton trunk-hose, no stomach, no breasts are underneath the blazoned tunics: these are clothes with the outward semblance of men, — no more. So away with the Middle Ages turned out for us by the hacks (there! the murder is out! Hacks!). The day of the Middle Ages is past; we want something else."

And the public, seeing that the writers for the press were barking at the heels of the Middle Ages, was seized with a great passion for those poor mediæval days which the critics thought they had killed at one stroke. The Middle Ages — helped on by newspaper opposition — invaded everything: the drama, the melodrama, the song, the tale, poetry; there were even mediæval vaudevilles, and Momus sang feudal refrains.

By the side of the mediæval novel budded the novel

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of rottenness, a very delightful form of tale, greatly in request among kept women of a nervous disposition, as also among disillusioned cooks of the female persuasion.

The newspaper writers were as quickly drawn by the stench thereof as are crows by a dead body, and with the sharp nib of their pens they tore to pieces and wickedly did to death this unhappy sort of novel, that only asked to prosper and to rot in peace upon the sticky shelves of circulating libraries. The things they said, the things they wrote about it! They called it morgue literature, penitentiary literature, hangman's nightmare, drunken butcher's hallucinations, delirious jailer's literature. They gently hinted that the authors were assassins and vampires, that they had contracted the virtuous habit of murdering their father and mother, that they drank blood out of skulls, used legbones for forks, and cut their bread with a guillotine.

And yet they knew better than any one — because they had often lunched with them — that the authors of these delightful butcheries were worthy sons of good families, debonair, belonging to good society, wearing white gloves, fashionably short-sighted, feeding by preference on beefsteak rather than on human chops, and as a rule drinking claret rather than the blood of maidens

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or new-born babes. Having seen and fingered their manuscripts, they knew very well that they were written in ink, on English paper, and not with blood from the dripping guillotine, upon the skin of a Christian that had been flayed alive.

But no matter what they said or did, the times wanted corruption, and the charnel house was preferred to the boudoir. The reader refused to be caught save by a hook baited with a small corpse in the first stage of putrefaction. This is easily understood. Bait your line with a rose, and the spiders will have time to weave their web in the crook of your elbow — you will catch not the smallest fish. But bait it with a worm or a bit of ripe cheese, and carps, barbels, pikes, and eels will leap three feet out of water to catch it. Men are not as unlike fishes as most people seem to think.

One might have thought the journalists had turned Brahmin, Quaker, or followers of Pythagoras, or bulls, so suddenly did they display a detestation of blood and of red. Never had they appeared so melting, so emollient; they were as cream and buttermilk. Two colours — sky-blue and apple-green — were alone recognised by them. They barely tolerated rose, and, had the public given them their way, they would have taken

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it to graze on spinach on the banks of the Lignon in company with the sheep of Amaryllis. They had exchanged their black frock-coat for the dove-coloured doublet of Celadon or Sylvander, and they had adorned their quills with Burgundy roses and favours after the manner of a shepherd's crook. They allowed their hair to grow long like children's, and by using Marion Delorme's recipe they had renewed their virginity with success equal to hers. They applied to literature the commandment of the Decalogue: Thou shalt not kill. Not the tiniest of murders was allowed, and a fifth act had become an impossibility.

They looked on the poniard as excessive, on poison as monstrous, on the axe as unmentionable. They would have had the heroes of dramas reach the good old age of a Melchisedec, although it has been recognised from times immemorial that the end and aim of every tragedy is the doing to death in the last scene of some poor helpless devil of a great man, just as the end and aim of every comedy is to join together in the bonds of holy matrimony two idiots of young lovers of some threescore years each of them.

It was about that time that I burned (after having made a careful copy, in accordance with unfailing cus-

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tom) two superb, magnificent mediæval dramas, the one in verse, the other in prose, the heroes whereof were quartered and boiled on the stage, an ending most jovial in itself and possessing the merit of almost complete novelty.

To conform to the critic's ideas, I have since then written a tragedy after the antique, in five acts, named "Heliogabalus," the hero of which precipitates himself into the latrines, a wholly new situation which has the advantage of involving a setting yet unknown to the stage. I also have written a modern drama vastly superior to "Antony Arthur, or The Fated Man," in which the heaven-sent idea arrives in the shape of a Strasburg *pâté de foie gras*, which the hero consumes to the uttermost atom, after having repeatedly committed rape; a combination which, remorse being added to it, brings on a violent attack of indigestion that causes his death. A moral ending, if ever there was one, which proves that *God is just*, and that vice is always punished, and virtue recompensed.

As for the monster variety, you know what they have done to it, how they have treated Han d'Islande, devourer of men, Habibrah the Obeah, Quasimodo the bell-ringer, and Triboulet, a mere hunchback; all the

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curiously swarming race, all the huge loathsomeness which my dear neighbour causes to abound and to hop around in the virgin forests and the cathedrals in his novels. Neither the mighty strokes after the manner of Michael Angelo, nor the peculiarities worthy of Callot, nor the effects of light and shade after the fashion of Goya, nothing, in short, found mercy at their hands. When he wrote novels they quoted his odes; when he composed dramas they sent him back to his novels; which is the customary procedure of newspaper writers, who always prefer what one has done to what one does. Happy the man, however, whose talent is acknowledged, even by the newspaper reviewers, to show in all his works, save of course the one they are reviewing, and who would merely have to write a theological treatise or a cookery-book to have his drama considered admirable.

As for the novel of the heart, the novel of fire and passion, whose father is Werther the German, and whose mother is Manon Lescaut the Frenchwoman, we have said something, at the beginning of this preface, of the moral leprosy which strenuously attaches to it under pretext of morality and religion. The lice of criticism resemble the lice of the human body,

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which desert the dead for the living. Abandoning the dead mediæval novel, the critics have fastened upon the novel of passion, which has a tough and living skin that may break their teeth.

We think, saving the respect we entertain for modern apostles, that the authors of these alleged immoral novels, though not as much married as the virtuous journalists, have usually a mother, that many have sisters, and own, too, numerous female relatives; but their mothers and sisters do not read novels, even immoral ones; they sew, embroider, and look after the house. Their stockings, as Mr. Planard might say, are spotlessly white; they can stand having their legs looked at — they are not blue; and old Chrysale, who so cordially hated learned women, would propose them as models to Philaminte.

As for these gentlemen's wives, since they have so many of them, virgin though their husbands be, it seems to me that there are certain things they are bound to know — though, after all, they may not have taught them anything. So I understand that they are anxious to maintain them in that precious and blessed ignorance. God is great and Mahomet is his prophet! Women are inquisitive; Heaven and

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morality grant that they satisfy their curiosity more legitimately than did Eve, their foremother, and that they do not go asking questions of the serpent.

As for their daughters, if they have been to boarding-school, I do not see what these books could possibly teach them.

It is just as absurd to say that a man is a drunkard because he describes an orgy, or a debauchee because he tells of a debauch, as to claim that a man is virtuous because he has written a work on morality; the contrary is met with every day. It is the characters that speak, not the author; his hero is an atheist, it does not follow that he is one himself. He makes brigands speak and act like brigands, but that does not make him one. If it did, Shakespeare, Corneille, and all tragic writers would have to be sent to the scaffold; they have committed more murders than Mandrin and Cartouche; yet it has not been done, and I doubt whether it will ever be done, however virtuous and moral criticism may become. It is one of the manias of these small-brained cads to constantly put the author in the place of his work, and to have recourse to personalities in order to give some flavour of scandal to their wretched lucubrations, which, they

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are well aware, no one would read did they contain but their own opinions.

We scarce understand the drift of all this abuse, anger, and vituperation, why these petty Geoffreys should play the part of Don Quixotes of morality and true literary policemen, why they should arrest and club, in the name of virtue, any idea which happens to trip through a book with its cap cocked the least little bit, or its skirts raised something too much. It is very curious.

The time, no matter what, they affirm is immoral (though we doubt whether "immoral" means anything); and no better proof is needed than the number of immoral books it produces and the success they meet with. Books are the product of manners, not manners of books. The Regency produced Crébillon; it was not Crébillon who made the Regency what it was. Boucher's shepherdesses were rouged and free and easy because the marchionesses of his day were rouged and of easy manners. Pictures are made from models, not models from pictures. I forget who has said that literature and art influence manners; whoever he was he was unquestionably a great ass. It is just as if one said, "Sweet peas make the spring grow." On the con-

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trary, sweet peas grow because it is springtime, and cherries, because it is summer-time. Trees bear fruits, not fruit, trees assuredly, — a law eternal, and invariable in its variety. Centuries follow centuries, and each has its results, which are not those of the preceding age; so books are the results of manners.

By the side of the moral journalist, under that shower of homilies comparable to rain in summer in a park, there has sprung up, between the planks of the Saint-Simon staging, a band of mushrooms of a new and curious kind, the natural history of which we shall now relate.

They are the utilitarian critics, — poor wights whose nose is so diminutive that spectacles cannot stay on them, and who yet cannot see as far as the end of their nose.

When an author threw a book on their table, novel or volume of verse, these gentlemen leaned nonchalantly back in their arm-chair, balanced it on its hind-legs, and themselves with a capable air, swelled out and said, —

" What is the good of this book? In what way can it be applied to the moral and physical improvement of our most numerous and poorest class? Why, there

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is not a word in it on the needs of society, nothing civilising, nothing progressive. How comes it that men write verse and novels that lead to nothing, which do not help on our generation on the road of the future, instead of taking up the great synthesis of humanity, and following out, through the events related by history, the phases of regenerating and providential thought? How can one trouble about form, style, rime, in presence of such grave interests? What do *we* care for style, rime, and form? We have nothing to do with them" (no, poor foxes; they are too green!). "Society is suffering; it is torn by fierce internal convulsions" (*id est*, no one cares to subscribe to useful papers). "It is the poet's business to seek out the cause of this disturbance and to cure it. He will find means to do so by sympathising with his heart and soul with humanity." (Philanthropic poets!—how rare and delightful they would be!) "We are awaiting that poet, we long for him. When he shall appear, his shall be the acclaim of the crowd, the palms, the abode in the Prytaneum. . . ."

That is all right, but, as we want our reader to keep awake to the end of this blessed preface, we shall not pursue further this most faithful imitation of the

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utilitarian style, which is essentially very soporific, and might advantageously be substituted for laudanum and academic discourses.

No, dolts, fools, and asses that you are, a book cannot be turned into gelatine soup, a novel is not a pair of seamless boots, a sonnet an automatic syringe, a drama is not a railway,—all of which things are essentially civilising and carry mankind along the road of progress.

No! by all the entrails of popes, past, present, and future, no,—two thousand times no!

You cannot make a nightcap out of a metonymy, a pair of slippers out of a comparison, an umbrella out of an antithesis; unfortunately, you cannot stick on your stomach a few variegated rimes by way of waistcoat. I am firmly convinced that an ode is too light a garment for winter, and that if one put on a strophe, an antistrophe, and an epode, one would not be more fully clothed than that Cynic's wife who, history tells us, was content with her virtue for a shift, and went about naked as a new-born babe.

And yet the famous De la Calprenède once had a coat, and when asked of what stuff it was, replied, "Sylvander." "Sylvander" was a play of his which had just been successfully performed.

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That sort of reasoning makes one shrug one's shoulders higher than one's head, higher than the Duke of Gloucester.

People who claim to be economists, and who propose to reconstruct society from top to bottom, gravely put forward such nonsense.

A novel is useful in two ways, the one material, the other spiritual, — if one may apply the term to a novel. The material use is, first, to the author, the few thousand francs which fall into his pocket and so ballast him that neither wind nor devil can carry him off; to the publisher, a fine blood-horse which plunges and paws the ground, when harnessed to the cabriolet of ebony and steel, as Figaro has it; to the paper-maker, another mill on some other stream, and often a means of spoiling a fine site; to the printers, a few tons of log-wood with which to colour their throats at their weekly drinking; to the circulating library, a whole lot of big pennies most vulgarly verdigrised, and a mass of grease that, were it properly collected and turned to account, would render the whale-fishery unnecessary. The spiritual use is that when one is reading novels one is asleep, instead of reading useful, virtuous, and progressive newspapers, or other indigestible and degrading drugs.

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Now, then, who will deny that novels make for civilisation? And I shall not speak of the tobacconists, grocers, and dealers in potato chips, who are each and all deeply interested in this branch of literature, the paper used in it being, as a general thing, of a much better quality than that used for newspapers.

Indeed it is enough to make one laugh a horse-laugh to hear those republican or Simonian gentry talk. First and foremost I should like to know the exact meaning of that great fool of a word with which they daily fill up their empty columns, and which is to them at once a shibboleth and a consecrated expression? Usefulness, — what is that word? What is it applied to?

There are two sorts of usefulness, and the meaning of the word itself is always relative. What is useful to one man is of no use to another. You are a cobbler, and I am a poet. It is of use to me that my first line of verse should rime with my second. A dictionary of rimes is of great use to me; it would be of no use whatever to you in patching an old pair of boots, and I am bound to say that a cobbler's knife would not be of any profit to me in the writing of an ode. Of course you may reply that a cobbler is far above a poet, and that one can dispense with the latter much better than

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with the former. Without venturing to cast discredit upon the illustrious profession of the cobbler, which I honour as highly as the profession of constitutional monarchs, I humbly confess that I would rather have a gaping seam in my shoe than a false rime to my verse, and that I would rather do without shoes than without poems. As I rarely go out, and progress more readily with my head than with my feet, I wear out less footwear than a virtuous republican who spends his whole time rushing from one department to another to obtain the contemptuous gift of some office or other.

I am aware that there are people who prefer mills to churches, and the bread of the body to the bread of the soul. I have nothing to say to such people. They deserve to be economists in this world and in the next likewise.

Is there anything absolutely useful on this earth and in this life of ours? To begin with, there is mighty little use in our being on this earth and living. I challenge the wisest of the company to tell us what we are good for unless it be not to subscribe to the *Constitutionnel* or any other paper.

Next, admitting that, *a priori*, our being in existence is of use, what are the things really necessary to sustain

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that existence? Soup and meat twice a day are all that is needed to fill our stomachs in the strict sense of the word. Man, to whom a coffin six feet long and two feet wide is more than sufficient after his death, does not need much more room while alive. A hollow cube, seven to eight feet each way, with a hole for fresh air, one cell in the hive, that is all he needs for a lodging and to keep off the rain. A blanket properly draped round his body will protect him against the cold as well as would the most stylish and well-fitting frock-coat turned out by Staub. Better, indeed.

Thus provided for he can literally live. It is said that a man can live on a shilling a day, but to barely keep from dying is not living, and I do not see in what respect a city organised on utilitarian lines would be a pleasanter residence than the cemetery of Père-Lachaise.

There is no one beautiful thing indispensable for mere living. Flowers might be suppressed without the world suffering materially from their loss, and yet who would be willing that there should be no more flowers? I would rather do without potatoes than without roses, and I believe there is but one utilitarian in the world capable of rooting up a bed of tulips and replacing them by cabbages.

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What is the use of beauty in woman? Provided a woman is physically well made and capable of bearing children, she will always be good enough in the opinion of economists.

What is the use of music? — of painting? Who would be fool enough nowadays to prefer Mozart to Carrel, Michael Angelo to the inventor of white mustard?

There is nothing really beautiful save what is of no possible use. Everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and man's needs are low and disgusting, like his own poor, wretched nature. The most useful place in a house is the water-closet.

For my part, saving these gentry's presence, I am of those to whom superfluities are necessaries, and I am fond of things and people in inverse ratio to the service they render me. I prefer a Chinese vase with its mandarins and dragons, which is perfectly useless to me, to a utensil which I do use, and the particular talent of mine which I set most store by is that which enables me not to guess logogriphs and charades. I would very willingly renounce my rights as a Frenchman and a citizen for the sight of an undoubted painting by Raphael, or of a beautiful nude woman, — Princess

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Borghese, for instance, when she posed for Canova, or Julia Grisi when she is entering her bath. I would most willingly consent to the return of that cannibal, Charles X., if he brought me, from his residence in Bohemia, a case of Tokai or Johannisberg; and the electoral laws would be quite liberal enough, to my mind, were some of our streets broader and some other things less broad. Though I am not a dilettante, I prefer the sound of a poor fiddle and tambourines to that of the Speaker's bell. I would sell my breeches for a ring, and my bread for jam. The occupation which best befits civilised man seems to me to be idleness or analytically smoking a pipe or a cigar. I think highly of those who play skittles, and also of those who write verse. You perceive that my principles are not utilitarian, and that I shall never be the editor of a virtuous paper, unless I am converted, which would be very comical.

Instead of founding a Monthyon prize for the reward of virtue, I would rather bestow — like Sardanapalus, that great, misunderstood philosopher — a large reward to him who should invent a new pleasure; for to me enjoyment seems to be the end of life and the only useful thing on this earth. God willed it to be so, for

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He created women, perfumes, light, lovely flowers, good wine, spirited horses, lapdogs, and Angora cats; for He did not say to his angels, "Be virtuous," but, "Love," and gave us lips more sensitive than the rest of the skin that we might kiss women, eyes looking upward that we might behold the light, a subtile sense of smell that we might breathe in the soul of the flowers, muscular limbs that we might press the flanks of stallions and fly swift as thought without railway or steam-kettle, delicate hands that we might stroke the long heads of greyhounds, the velvety fur of cats, and the polished shoulder of not very virtuous creatures, and, finally, granted to us alone the triple and glorious privilege of drinking without being thirsty, striking fire, and making love in all seasons, whereby we are very much more distinguished from brutes than by the custom of reading newspapers and framing constitutions.

By Jupiter! what a stupid thing is that pretended perfectibility of human kind which is being constantly dinned into our ears! In truth, it would make it appear that man is a mechanism capable of improvements, and that a cog-wheel more accurately engaged, a counterpoise more suitably placed, are able to make that mechanism work more commodiously and more easily.

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When man shall have been given two stomachs, so that he can chew the cud like an ox; eyes at the back of his head so that, like Janus, he can see those who are putting their tongues out at him behind his back, and can contemplate his posterior in a less constrained attitude than the Venus Callypige of Athens; when he shall have had wings stuck into his shoulder-blades, so that he shall not have to pay threepence to go in a 'bus, when he shall have had a new organ bestowed on him, — then, all right, the word "perfectibility," will begin to mean something.

With all these fine improvements what has been done that was not as well and better done before the Deluge? Has man succeeded in drinking more than he did in the days of ignorance and barbarism (old style)? Alexander, the equivocal friend of handsome Hephæstion, was no mean toper, though in his day there existed no *Journal of Useful Knowledge*; and I know of no utilitarian who could drain — without fear of becoming wine-stricken and swelling to a size greater than that of Lepeintre the younger, or a hippopotamus — the huge cup he called Hercules' tankard. Marshal Bassompierre, who drank a jackboot full to the health of the Thirteen Cantons, strikes me as a singu-

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larly estimable man in his way, and one very difficult to improve upon.

Where is the economist capable of enlarging our stomach so that it shall contain as many beefsteaks as could that of Milo of Croton, who ate an ox? The menu at the Café Anglais or Véfour or at such other famous restaurant as you please, seems to me very meagre and œcumenical by the side of the menu at Trimalcion's dinner. Where is the table on which you can now have served up in a single dish a wild sow and her twelve young boars? Who among us has eaten sea-eels and lampreys fed on human flesh? Do you conscientiously believe that Brillat-Savarin has improved on Apicius? Think you that fat swine Vitellius could fill his famous Minerva buckler with the brains of pheasants and peacocks, with the tongues of flamingoes and the livers of parrot-fish at Chevet's? What do your oysters at the Rocher de Cancale amount to in comparison with those of the Lucrine lake, for which special sea water was prepared? The suburban assignation-houses of the Regency marquesses are wretched drink-shops compared with the villas of Roman patricians at Baia, Capri, and Tibur. The cyclopean splendours of these mighty voluptuaries, who built enduring

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monuments for a day's pleasuring, should make us fall prostrate at the feet of the genius of antiquity and forever strike from our dictionaries the word "perfectibility."

Has a single additional mortal sin been invented? Unfortunately, the number of them is still seven, as of yore, the number of a just man's falls in one day — pretty small. I do not even believe that after a century of progress at the present rate, there is a single amorous man capable of repeating the thirteenth labour of Hercules. Can one make things pleasanter for one's goddess than in Solomon's time? Many very illustrious scholars and many very respectable ladies affirm the opposite, and declare that amatory energy is steadily decreasing. Then, why talk of progress? I know very well that you will say we have an upper and a lower Chamber, that universal suffrage is expected, and the number of deputies to be doubled or tripled. Do you think there is not enough bad French spoken from the national tribune, and that there are not enough deputies for the wretched job they have to do? I do not see much use in collecting two or three hundred countrymen in a wooden barracks, with a ceiling painted by Fragonard, and to set them to pottering at and spoil-

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ing I know not how many petty, absurd, or abominable laws. What matters it whether it is a sword, a holy water sprinkler, or an umbrella that rules you? It is a stick all the same, and I am amazed that progressive men should squabble over the kind of club which is to be laid across their shoulders, when it would be far more progressive and far less costly to break it and to throw the pieces away.

There is but one of you with common-sense; he is a lunatic, a great genius, an ass, a divine poet far superior to Lamartine, Hugo, and Byron. It is Charles Fourrier, the phalansterian, who is all these things in himself. He alone has been logical enough and bold enough to carry out consequences to their ultimate end. He affirms without hesitation that men will shortly have fifteen-foot tails with an eye at the end; which is assuredly an improvement, and enables one to do many a fine thing that was impossible before, — such as smashing an elephant's head without striking a blow, swinging from trees without having a rope-swing, as easily as does the most perfect monkey, to do without a parasol or umbrella by merely spreading one's tail over one's head like a plume, after the fashion of squirrels, which do without umbrellas with no

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inconvenience, — and other prerogatives too numerous to mention. Several phalansterians indeed claim that they already have a bit of a tail, which would willingly grow longer if Heaven should let them live long enough.

Charles Fourrier has invented as many kinds of animals as the great naturalist Cuvier. He has invented horses which are to be three times the size of elephants, dogs as huge as tigers, fishes capable of feeding more people than Jesus Christ's three fishes; a story which incredulous followers of Voltaire call a fish story, and which I call a magnificent parable. He has built cities by the side of which Rome, Babylon, and Tyre are but mole-hills; he has heaped Babels on Babels, and carried into soaring heights spirals more unending than those in all John Martin's engravings. He has invented I know not how many orders of architecture, and how many seasonings. He has planned a theatre which would strike even Romans of the Empire as grandiose, and drawn up a dinner menu which Lucius or Nomentanus would perchance have considered sufficient for a small dinner. He promises to create new pleasures, and to develop the organs and the senses. He is going to make women

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more beautiful and more passionate, men more robust and more capable; he warrants your having children, and intends to so diminish the population of the world that everybody shall be comfortable in it; which is more sensible than to urge the proletariat to engender more inhabitants, and, when those swarm beyond reason, to sweep them off the streets with artillery, and to fire cannon-balls at them instead of giving them bread.

Only in this way is progress possible. Any other is bitter derision, a witless prank, not good enough to fool even credulous idiots.

The phalanstery is really an improvement on the abbey of Thelema, and finally disposes of the Earthly Paradise as a worn-out, old-fashioned concern. Alone the "Thousand and One Nights" and Madame d'Aubray's "Tales," can successfully compete with the phalanstery. What fertility and invention! There is enough in it to supply marvels for three thousand waggon-loads of romantic or classic poems; and our versifiers, whether of the Academy or not, are pretty small inventors in comparison with Charles Fourrier, the inventor of passionate attractions. It is unquestionably a great and lofty idea to turn to use movements which hitherto it has been sought to repress.

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Ah! you claim that we are progressing. If to-morrow the crater of a volcano opened at Montmartre and threw over Paris a pall of ashes and a shroud of lava, as Vesuvius did of yore over Stabiæ, Pompeii, and Herculaneum, and if, some thousands of years later, the antiquarians of those days began excavations and brought to light the remains of the dead city, tell me, what monument would have remained standing to testify to the splendour of the great buried, the Gothic Notre-Dame? A pretty idea of our art would the Tuileries — touched up by M. Fontaine — give when brought to light! And how fine would be the statues of the Louis XV. bridge when transported into the museums of that day! And apart from paintings of the old schools, and the statues of antiquity or of the Renaissance collected in the gallery of the Louvre, that long shapeless passage; apart from the ceiling Ingres painted, which would prevent people from believing that Paris was a camping-ground of Barbarians, a village of the Welch or the Topinambous, what might be dug up would be mighty curious. Flint-locks of the National Guard, firemen's helmets, crowns stamped with an ugly die, — that is what would be found, instead of those fine weapons, so exquisitely

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chased, which the Middle Ages left within the towers and the ruined tombs, of the medals which fill Etruscan vases and underlie the foundations of all Roman constructions. As for our contemptible veneered wood furniture, all those wretched boxes, so bare, so ugly, so mean, that are called commodes or desks, all those shapeless and fragile utensils, I hope that Time would have pity enough on them to destroy the very last trace of them.

We did once get it into our heads to build ourselves a grand and splendid monument. We were first obliged to borrow the plan from the old Romans; then, even before it was finished, our Pantheon began to give way below like a child with the rickets, and swayed like a dead-drunk pensioner, so that it had to be provided with stone crutches, else it would have fallen flat in sight of the whole world and would have afforded food for laughter to the nations for more than a century. We wanted to stick up an obelisk on one of our two squares; we had to go and steal it in Luxor, and it took us two years to bring it home. Ancient Egypt bordered its roads with obelisks as we border ours with poplars; it carried bundles of them under its arms, as a market-gardener carries

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asparagus, and it cut a monolith out of the slopes of its granite mountains more easily than we cut out an ear-pick or a toothpick. Some centuries ago they had Raphael and Michael Angelo; now we have Mr. Paul Delaroche, and all because we are progressing.

You brag of your Opera house; ten Opera houses the size of yours could dance a saraband in a Roman amphitheatre. Even Mr. Martin, with his lame tiger and his poor gouty lion, as drowsy as a subscriber to the *Gazette*, cuts a pretty small figure by the side of a gladiator of antiquity. What are your benefit performances, lasting till two in the morning, compared with those games which lasted a hundred days, with those performances in which real ships fought real battles on a real sea; when thousands of men earnestly carved each other — turn pale, O heroic Franconi! — when, the sea having withdrawn, the desert appeared, with its raging tigers and lions, fearful supernumeraries that played but once; when the leading part was played by some robust Dacian or Pannonian athlete, whom it would often have been mighty difficult to recall at the close of the performance, whose leading lady was some splendid and hungry lioness of Numidia starved for three days? Do you not con-

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sider the clown elephant superior to Mlle. Georges? Do you believe Taglioni dances better than did Arbuscula, and Perrot better than Bathyllus? Admirable as is Bocage, I am convinced Roscius could have given him points. Galeria Coppiola played young girls' parts, when over one hundred years old; it is true that the oldest of our leading ladies is scarcely more than sixty, and that Mlle. Mars has not even progressed in that direction. The ancients had three or four thousand gods in whom they believed, and we have but one, in whom we scarcely believe. That is a strange sort of progress. Is not Jupiter worth a good deal more than Don Juan, and is he not a much greater seducer? By my faith, I know not what we have invented, or even wherein we have improved.

Next to the progressive journalists and by way of antithesis to them, come the disillusioned. These range in age from twenty to twenty-two; they have never gone beyond the confines of their quarter, and have lain only with their housekeeper. But everything bores them, palls on them, wearies them; they are uninterested, disillusioned, worn out, inaccessible. They know beforehand just what you are going to say; they have seen everything, felt everything, borne every-

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thing, heard everything it is possible to feel, see, hear, or experience; there is no recess of the human heart so obscure that the beams of their lantern have not shone into it. They tell you with the utmost coolness: "The human heart is not like that; women are not so constituted; that character is not true to nature." Or else, "What! never anything but love and hate, men and women? Have you nothing else to talk about? Man, as a subject, is worn threadbare, and so is woman, since M. de Balzac has taken her up. Who shall deliver me from men and women? You fancy, sir, your fabulation is novel? It is as stale as stale can be; nothing staler. I read it, I forget where, when I was at nurse or something else; it has been dinned into my ears for ten years past. Moreover, know, sir, that there is nothing of which I am ignorant, that everything is stale and unprofitable to me, and that, were your idea as virginal as the Virgin Mary, I should none the less affirm that I had seen it prostitute itself at the street-corners to the veriest cads and low fellows."

It is to these journalists we owe Jocko, the Green Monster, the Lyons of Mysore and many another fine invention.

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They are always complaining of having to read books and to see plays. If they have to write about a wretched vaudeville they bring in the almond-trees in flower, the lime-trees with their perfumed bloom, the breezes of springtime, the scent of the young leafage; they set up for lovers of nature after the fashion of young Werther, though they have never set foot outside of Paris, and could not tell a cabbage from a beet. If it happens to be winter they will talk of the pleasures of the home fireside, of crackling blazes, andirons, slippers, reverie, and dozing, and will not fail to quote the famous line from Tibullus, —

"*Quam juvat immites ventos audire cubantem;*"

which will allow them to assume the most charmingly naïve and disillusioned air. They will pose as men insensible henceforth to the work of men, whom dramatic emotions leave cold and hard as the penknife with which they mend their pen, but they will yell, all the same, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "There 's a periwinkle!" They profess fierce antipathy for Gymnase colonels, American uncles, cousins of both sexes, sentimental veterans, romantic widows, and they try to cure us of our love of vaudeville by daily giving proof in their articles that the Frenchman was not

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born witty. As a matter of fact, we do not object to this, and, on the contrary, gladly own that the disappearance of vaudevilles and comic opera (a national *genre*) in France would be a great blessing. But I should like to know what kind of literature these gentlemen would allow to take their place. True, it could not possibly be worse.

Others preach against bad taste, and translate Seneca, the tragic writer. Lately, by way of bringing up the rear of the procession, a new and yet unknown band of critics has been formed.

Their formula of appreciation is the most convenient, the most widely applicable, the most malleable, the most peremptory, superlative, and victorious that could ever be invented by any critic. Zoïlus would certainly not have suffered by it.

Until now, when it was desired to run down a book, or to give a bad opinion of it to the ancient and artless subscriber, incorrect or perfidiously incomplete quotations were made from it; sentences were deformed, lines mutilated in such wise that the author himself would have owned his work most ridiculous. He was accused of imaginary plagiarisms; passages from his book were compared with passages from ancient or

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modern writers that in no wise resembled his; he was charged, in the worst of French, and with endless solecisms, with being unacquainted with his mother tongue, and with debasing the French of Racine and Voltaire; his work drove readers to anthropophagy, and his readers invariably fell victims, within a week, to cannibalism or hydrophobia. But all that sort of thing had become stale, behind the times, exploded sham, and ancient history. By dint of having dragged its slow length along the notices, reviews, and gossip columns, the charge of immorality had lost its force, and had become so utterly unserviceable that scarce any paper, save the chaste and progressive *Constitutionnel*, was desperately courageous enough to revamp it.

So the criticism of the future, prospective criticism was invented. All at once; fancy that! Is it not splendid, and does it not betoken a fine power of imagination? The recipe is simple and easily told. The book which shall be praised is the book which has not yet been published. The one that is just published is infallibly detestable. To-morrow's will be splendid, but it never is to-morrow. This form of criticism proceeds like the barber who had on his sign in large letters, — FREE SHAVE TO-MORROW.

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All the poor devils who read the sign looked forward to enjoying next day the ineffable and supreme delight of being, once in their life, shaved without money and without price, and their beard grew six inches longer with delighted anticipation during the night which preceded the happy day. But when, neck enwrapped in napkin, the barber asked whether they had any money and told them to be ready to shell out, or he would treat them as are treated the purloiners of nuts and the appropriators of apples, and he swore his biggest oath that unless they paid he would slice their throats with his razor, then the poor devils, much cast down and crestfallen, pointed to the sign and its sacrosanct inscription. "Ha! ha!" would the barber laugh; "your education has been neglected, my little ones, and you ought to go back to school. The sign says, 'To-morrow.' I am not of so foolish or fantastic humour as to give a free shave to-day; my colleagues would accuse me of ruining the business. Come back last time, or when Sunday falls in the middle of the week, and you will be all right. May I then rot to perdition if I do not shave you free, on the word of an honest barber."

Authors who read a prospective article, in which an existing work is run down, always flatter themselves

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that the book they are at work on will be the book of the future. So far as they are able, they try to fall in with the critic's views, and turn social, progressive, moral, palingenetic, mythic, pantheist, buchezist, believing that they shall thus escape the awful anathema; but it is with them as with the barber's customers: to-day is not to-morrow's eve. Never will that long-promised to-morrow dawn upon the world, for the trick is too useful to be soon given up. While decrying the book he is jealous of, and that he would fain destroy, the critic assumes the air of the most generous impartiality. He makes it appear that he would dearly like to approve and to praise, but he never does approve or praise. This method is unquestionably superior to that which may be called retrospective, and which consists in praising none save ancient works, which are never read nowadays, and which disturb no one, at the expense of modern works, which we are concerned with, and which more directly wound self-love.

On entering upon this review of critics we stated that there was matter enough for fifteen or sixteen folio volumes, but that we should confine ourselves to a few lines. I begin to fear that these few lines prove

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to be two to three thousand yards long apiece, and resemble those pamphlets so thick that they cannot be pierced by a penknife thrust, and whose treacherous title reads, "A Few Words on the Revolution," — or, "A Few Words on This or That." The story of the deeds, of the many loves of the diva Magdalen de Maupin would run great danger of being passed by, and it will readily be conceived that it will take at least a whole volume to sing, as they deserve to be sung, the adventures of that fair Bradamante. That is why, however desirous we may be, to carry still further the description of the illustrious Aristarchs of the day, we shall be satisfied with the brief sketch we have just given, and add a few reflections on the simplicity of our debonair fellow-poets who, with the stupidity of a pantomime Pantaloon, stand, without a murmur, the blows of Harlequin's bat and the kicks of the clown. They are like a fencing master who should, in an assault of arms, cross his arms behind his back, and let his opponent pink him in the breast without once parrying; or like speeches for the plaintiff and the defendant, of which the King's attorney's only should be heard; or like a debate in which reply was forbidden.

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The critic affirms this and affirms that; he puts on airs and slashes away: —absurd, detestable, monstrous, like nothing that ever was; like everything that ever has been. A new drama is played; the critic goes to see it; it turns out that the play in no wise corresponds to the one which, on the strength of the title, the critic has evolved for himself; therefore, in his review, he substitutes his own play for the author's. He serves up his erudition in strong doses; he pours out all the knowledge he got up the day before in some library or other, and treats in heathenish fashion people at whose feet he ought to sit, and the most ignorant of whom could give points to much wiser men than he.

Authors bear this sort of thing with a magnanimity and a patience that are really incomprehensible. For, after all, who are those critics, who with their trenchant tone, their dicta, might be supposed sons of the gods? They are simply fellows who were at college with us, and who have turned their studies to less account, since they have not produced anything, and can do no more than soil and spoil the works of others, like true stymphalid vampires.

There is something to be done in the way of criticising critics; for those fine contemners who pose as be-

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ing so haughty and difficult to please are far from being as infallible as the Holy Father. Such a criticism would more than fill a daily paper of large size. The blunders they make in matters historical and others, their misquotations, their bad French, their plagiarisms, their foolish babble, their threadbare jokes in most evil taste, their lack of ideas, of intelligence, of tact, their ignorance of the simplest things, which makes them mistake the Piræus for a man, and Mr. Delaroche for a painter, would afford authors material enough for revenge, without their having to do more than underline the extracts and reproduce them textually; for a great writer's commission does not go along with a critic's commission, and in order to avoid errors in grammar, or of taste, it is not enough to reproach others with making them, as our critics plainly prove every day in the week. If it were men like Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and others of that sort who wrote criticisms, I could understand people going down on their knees and worshipping; but what disgusts me and furiously angers me is that Messrs. Z., K., Y., V., Q., X., or some other letter of the alphabet between Alpha and Omega, should set up as small Quinctilians and scold us in the name of morals and letters. I wish there were a police ordinance

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forbidding certain names to bump up against others. I know a cat may look at a king, and that even the gigantic proportions of St. Peter's at Rome cannot prevent the Transteverini filthying its base in strange fashion, but I none the less believe it would be absurd to inscribe across certain reputations, "Commit no nuisance." Charles X. alone thoroughly grasped the question. He rendered a great service to arts and civilisation when he ordered the suppression of the press. Newspapers are something like brokers or horse-dealers, who intervene between the artists and the public, the king and the public. Every one knows the fine result that has followed. This perpetual barking deadens inspiration and spreads such mistrust in hearts and minds that one dare trust neither poet nor government; so that poesy and royalty, the two greatest things in the world, become impossible, to the great misfortune of the nations which sacrifice their well-being to the petty satisfaction of reading every morning a few sheets of inferior paper dirtied with bad ink and worse style. There was no art criticism under Julius II., and I have not come across any articles of the day on Daniele da Volterra, Sebastiano del Piombo, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Ghiberti della Porta, or Benvenuto Cellini;

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and yet I am of opinion that, for people who had no newspapers and who knew nothing of the words "art" or "artistic," they had their fair share of talent and knew their trade pretty well. The reading of newspapers is a bar to the existence of real scholars and genuine artists; it is comparable to daily excess, which lands you worn out and weak on the couch of the Muses, those hard, exacting maids who will have none but lusty and virgin lovers. The newspaper kills the book as the book killed architecture, as artillery has killed courage and muscular strength. No one suspects of what numberless treasures we are robbed by the newspapers. They take the bloom off everything; they prevent our really owning anything, our having a book to our very self. At the theatre they prevent our being surprised, and reveal to us beforehand the ending of every piece. They deprive us of the delight of tittle-tattle, gossip, back-biting and slander, of inventing a piece of news, or of carting a true one for a week through all the drawing-rooms of society. Whether we will it or not, they proclaim ready-made judgments; they prejudice us against things we would like. They are the cause that dealers in matches, provided they are endowed with memory, talk as much absurd nonsense

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about literature as do members of provincial Academies. It is to them that we are indebted for hearing all day long, instead of artless notions or individual idiotic remarks, ill-digested scraps of newspapers that are for all the world like omelets raw on one side and burned on the other; that we are pitilessly stuffed with news three or four hours old, already familiar to babes and sucklings. They deaden our taste and reduce us to the level of those drinkers of peppered alcohol, of the swallowers of files and scrapers, who find the finest wines flavourless and miss their perfumed and flowery bouquet. I should be infinitely obliged to Louis-Philippe if he would, once for all, suppress all literary and political sheets, and I should forthwith rime for him fine wild dithyrambics in the freest of verse and alternate rimes, signed, "Your most humble and most faithful subject," etc.

And let it not be supposed that literature would cease to interest, for in the days before newspapers were, Paris was busy four days on end with a quatrain, and talked of a first performance for six months.

It is true that suppression of the press would mean the loss of advertisements and of praise at eighteen pence a line, and notoriety would be less prompt and less

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tremendously sudden. But I have thought of a very ingenious way of filling the place of advertisements. If between now and the publication of this glorious novel my gracious sovereign has suppressed the press, I shall most assuredly use my method, and I expect wonders from it. The great day having come, twenty-four criers on horseback, wearing the publisher's livery with his address on breast and back, bearing in their hands banners on both sides of which would be embroidered the title of the novel, and each preceded by a tambourine and by kettledrums, should go through the streets of the city and, stopping in squares and at the crossings of streets, they should proclaim in a loud and intelligible voice: "It is to-day, not yesterday or to-morrow, that is published the admirable, inimitable, divine and more than divine novel of the most famous Théophile Gautier, 'Mademoiselle de Maupin,' which Europe, and even the other parts of the world and Polynesia have been impatiently expecting for more than a year past. It is being sold at the rate of five hundred copies a minute, and new editions appear every half-hour. A picket of municipal guards is stationed at the shop door to keep back the crowd and prevent disorder in any shape." That would certainly

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be worth just as much as a three-line advertisement in the *Débats* and the *Courrier français*, between elastic belts, crinoline collars, patent-nipple nursing-bottles, Regnault's comfits, and recipes for toothache.

May, 1834.

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Mademoiselle de Maupin

I

YOU complain of the infrequency of my letters, my dear friend. But what am I to write about, now that I am well and as fond of you as ever? This much you know perfectly well, and at my age and with your fine qualities it is so natural that it is almost ridiculous to send a poor little sheet of paper travelling three hundred miles merely to say that. In vain I ransack my memory, I find nothing worth telling; my life is the most uniform in the world, and nothing occurs to break its monotony. To-day brings to-morrow just as yesterday brought to-day; and without making any pretensions to the gift of prophecy, I may boldly predict in the morning what will befall me in the evening.

In this wise is my daily life ordered: I rise, of course, and thus begin each day; I breakfast, fence, go out, return, dine, pay a few visits or read. Then I go to bed, just as I did the night before; I go to sleep, and my imagination, not having been stirred up by

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novel objects, treats me only to a repetition of the same old dreams, which are as monotonous as my waking existence; all of which is not very exciting, as you see. And yet I am better satisfied with this sort of life than I should have been six months ago. I am bored, it is true, but in a quiet, resigned way, which may not inaptly be compared to those dull, soft autumn days which are not without a secret charm after the great heat of summer.

This sort of life, though I am outwardly reconciled to it, is scarcely the one to suit me; at least it is very unlike that of which I dream, and for which I think myself fitted. I am mistaken, perhaps, and this may be the very kind of life for which I am fitted; but I find this difficult to believe, for, were it really my destiny, I should accommodate myself more easily to it, and not be bruised by its asperities so often and so painfully.

You are aware of the irresistible attraction extraordinary adventures have for me; that I fairly worship everything singular, excessive, and perilous, and that I devour with avidity novels and books of travel. No one on earth, perchance, is endowed with so fantastic and erratic a fancy as mine; and spite of it, I

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know not by what malign fate it comes about that never has an adventure befallen me, never have I made a voyage. As far as I am concerned, going round the world means going round the town I inhabit; on all sides the confines of my horizon are within easy reach. I rub elbows with reality. My life is that of the shellfish on the sand-bank, of the ivy that clings to the tree, of the cricket on the hearth. Indeed, I wonder I have not actually taken root.

Cupid is depicted blindfolded; Fate it is that should be thus shown.

For servant I have a sort of heavy, stupid lout who has travelled as far and wide as the north wind; who has gone to the devil, to all sorts of places; who has seen with his own eyes all that my fancy paints, and cares not a straw for it all; who has been in the most extraordinary situations; who has had the most amazing adventures. Sometimes I set him talking, and I swear as I reflect that all these fine things have happened to an ass incapable of thought or feeling, fit only to do what he does — brush clothes and black boots.

Plainly, that rascal's life should be mine. On his part, he thinks I am a very happy man, and wonders greatly at seeing me as sad as I am.

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Not very interesting all this, my poor friend, and scarcely worth writing, is it not? But as you insist on my writing to you, I have to tell you my thoughts, my feelings, my ideas, since events and actions are lacking. What I have to say may not be marked by much orderliness or novelty; blame yourself in that case, for you have willed it.

We have been friends from childhood; we were brought up together; we lived our life in common for a long time, and have been accustomed to confide to each other our most secret thoughts. So I may relate to you, without a blush, all the nonsense that flits through my idle brain; naught shall I add and naught extenuate; I have no self-love when writing to you. Therefore I shall be absolutely truthful, even with respect to small and shameful things; from you I shall assuredly conceal nothing.

Under those cerements of nonchalant and dejected weariness of which I but now spoke, stirs at times a thought benumbed rather than dead, for melancholy's sweet and sad tranquillity is not always with me. I have relapses, and I fall a prey to my old preoccupations. Nothing is more fatiguing than these motiveless agitations and these aimless impulses. When they seize

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upon me, although I have not any more to do than on any other day, I rise very early, before the sun, for I seem to myself to be in a great hurry and to lack time in which to do all I have to do. I jump into my clothes as if the house were on fire, and mourn over every minute lost. Any one seeing me then would swear I was going to keep a love tryst or to receive money. Nothing of the sort. I do not even know where I am going, but go I must, and I feel my soul's salvation would be endangered did I stay. I fancy some one calls to me from without, that my fate is just then going down the street, and that my destiny is about to be settled.

I go down, with a staring, surprised look, my clothes awry, my hair ill-brushed. Those who meet me look round, laugh, and take me for a young debauchee who has made a night of it in a tavern or elsewhere. Drunk I am, but not with wine, and my walk is unsteady, like a drunkard's, now quick, now slow. I wander from street to street like a lost dog, nosing around, restless, inquisitive, turning around at the least sound, making my way into every knot of people, careless of the rebuff of those against whom I knock up, and observing everything with a keenness of sight un-

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possessed by me at other times. Then suddenly something tells me I am mistaken; that this is certainly not the place, that I must go farther, to the city's end, anywhere, and off I go as if the devil were after me. My feet scarcely touch the ground; I am light as air. I must indeed present a singular appearance with my busy, excited look, my arms going, and inarticulate sounds coming from my lips. When I think it over quietly I laugh at myself very heartily, but all the same I repeat the performance the very next time.

I should be greatly puzzled to say what it is that drives me to rush about in such fashion. I am in no hurry to get anywhere, for I am not going anywhere. I am not afraid of being behind time, for I am not bound down to any time. No one is waiting for me, and there is no reason why I should hurry in this place.

Can it be that my life needs a chance to love, an adventure, a woman, an idea, a fortune, something or another, and that I seek after it unconsciously, driven on by some vague instinct? Is it that my life seeks to round itself out? That I feel the need of going out of myself and of my house? That I am weary of my condition and seek another? Perchance something of

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this, and perchance all this. Whatever it be, it is a most unpleasant state of mind, a feverish irritation, usually followed by the flattest depression.

It often occurs to me that if I had started an hour earlier, or if I had hurried, I should have been on time; that while I was going along this street, the something I am looking for was passing down the other and that a block of carriages sufficed to make me miss what I have been looking for at random for so long a season. You cannot imagine the deep sadness and profound gloom into which I fall when I see the uselessness of it all, my youth passing away and no future opening before me. Then all my unoccupied passions growl in my heart with low mutterings and devour one another for want of other food, like the animals in a menagerie when the keeper has forgotten to feed them. In spite of daily stifled and hidden disappointments, something resists in me and will not die. I am hopeless, for hope implies desire, a certain tendency to wish that things would happen in one way rather than in another. I desire nothing in particular, for it is everything that I long for. I do not hope, or rather I have ceased to hope, — it is too utterly stupid; whether things are or not is a matter of profound indifference to me. What

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is it I expect? I do not know, but I keep on expecting.

Expecting with trembling eagerness, full of impatience, with sudden starts and nervous tremors, like a lover awaiting his mistress. Nothing comes; then I rage or weep. I keep on expecting the heavens to open and an angel to descend bearing a revelation to me; expecting a revolution to break out and a crown to be given me; expecting a Madonna of Raphael to step out of the canvas and to embrace me; relatives, whom I have not, to die and leave me wherewithal to let my fancy drift adown a golden stream; a hippogriff to take me and bear me away to climes unknown. But no matter what it is that I expect, it is never by any chance commonplace or mediocre.

I carry this so far that, when returned home, I never fail to say, "No one called? Are there no letters for me? Nothing new?" I know very well there is nothing, there can be nothing. All the same I am always greatly surprised and deeply disappointed when I hear the usual answer, "No, sir; nothing at all."

Sometimes — rarely, however — my thought becomes more concrete. It is, maybe, some beautiful woman, whom I do not know and who does not know

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me, whom I shall have met at the theatre or at church, and who will not have even noticed me. I go through every part of the house, and until I have opened the door of the last room of all, I go on hoping — I dare scarce say it, so mad is it — that she has come, that she is there. It is not conceit. I have so little self-conceit that several women have very gently striven to attract me, — so I am told by others, — while I believed they cared nothing for me and had never bestowed a thought upon me. It springs from another cause.

When I am not stupefied by dulness and discouragement, my soul revives and resumes all its former vigour. I hope, love, desire; and my desires are so violent that I imagine they will compel all to come to them, as a powerful magnet draws to itself every particle of iron, distant though it may be. That is why I await the fulfilment of my wishes instead of bringing it about, and often enough neglect the opportunities which are most favourable to my hopes. Another man would write the tenderest note to his heart's love, or would seek an opportunity to meet her. I, on the other hand, ask of the messenger the answer to the letter I have not written, and spend my time imagining the most amazing situations in order to exhibit myself

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to her I love in the most unexpected and favourable light. The stratagems I invent in order to draw near to her and reveal my passion would make a volume thicker and more interesting than the "Stratagems" of Polybius. As a matter of fact, nothing more would be needed usually than to say to a friend, "Present me to Mrs. So-and-So," and to utter a mythological compliment duly punctuated with sighs.

Any one hearing me talk like this would think me a fit subject for a lunatic asylum. Yet am I a sensible fellow enough, and I have seldom put my crazy imaginings into action. All these things go on in the recesses of my mind; all these absurd notions are carefully buried deep within me. Nothing of them is visible externally, and I enjoy the reputation of being a quiet, cold young man, not much attracted by women, and indifferent to the pleasures of my age, — a belief as far from the truth as the beliefs of the world usually are.

And yet, in spite of the many things which have rebuffed me, some of my wishes have been fulfilled, and the smallness of the pleasure this fulfilment has brought me has led me to dread the gratification of further desires. You remember with what childish ardour I longed to have a horse of my own; my mother gave me

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one quite recently. He is black as a coal, with a white star on the forehead; long-maned, long-tailed, with a glistening coat and slender limbed, exactly as I wished him to be. When he was brought to me my emotion was so great that for more than fifteen minutes I remained quite pale, unable to pull myself together. Then I mounted and, without a word, went off at full speed and galloped for more than an hour straight ahead across country in a state of delight difficult to conceive. I repeated this every day for a week and more, and I marvel that I did not kill the horse, or at the very least break his wind. Little by little my great ardour cooled. I took to trotting, then to walking, then to riding so idly that often my steed stops without my being aware of it. My pleasure turned into a habit far sooner than I could have believed it possible. As for Ferragus, — that is the name I have given him, — he is the finest mount you can come across. He has hair on his fetlocks soft as eagle's down; he is quick as a goat and gentle as a lamb. You will keenly enjoy riding him when you come here, and, although my riding craze has greatly diminished, I am still very fond of him, for as an equine he has an excellent disposition, and I honestly prefer him to many persons. I wish

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you could hear his neigh of delight when I go to the stables to pay him a visit, and see the intelligent way in which he looks at me! These marks of affection touch me, I confess, and I put my arm round his neck and kiss him as tenderly, i' faith, as if he were a handsome maid.

There was another wish, stronger, fiercer, more continually alive, more dearly caressed, and for which I had built in my heart a lovely house of cards, a palace of fancy, often destroyed and again rebuilt with despairing persistence, — the wish to have a mistress, a mistress who should be wholly mine, like my horse. I know not whether, had this dream come true, I should not as quickly have grown cold as in the other case, but I do not think so. Perhaps I am wrong, however, and weariness would have been as swift-footed. Owing to my peculiar disposition, I desire so frantically what I do desire — though without taking any steps to obtain it — that if by chance, or otherwise, I gain the object of my longing, I suffer from such acute moral fatigue, I am so worn out by it, that I feel faint, and lack strength to enjoy it; so what happens to me without my having wished for it gives me usually much more pleasure than what I have ardently desired.

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I am twenty-two years old and my virginity is gone. Alas! nowadays virginity in body, or, worse still, in heart, is a thing unknown at my age. Besides such women as sell pleasure to men for money and who are of no more account than a lascivious dream, I have had, of course, here and there, in some obscure corner, some honest or almost honest women, neither handsome nor ugly, young nor old, such as are apt to offer themselves to young men who have no regular tie and whose heart happens to be unoccupied. If you are willing to make an effort and if you have a pretty strong dose of romantic illusions, you can call that sort of thing having a mistress if you like. I cannot, for my part, and if I had a thousand of that sort of women I should still consider my desire as unfulfilled as ever.

So I have yet had no mistress, and my sole desire is to have one. The obsession of this desire is curious; it does not spring from an over-passionate temperament, from heat of the blood, or a first effervescence of puberty. It is not woman whom I desire; it is a woman, a mistress. I mean to have one, and I shall have one before very long. If I should fail in this, I confess I should never recover from it, and the conse-

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quence would be an inward timidity towards myself, a dull discouragement that would seriously influence me during the remainder of my life. I should consider myself imperfect in certain respects, lacking in balance, or without an affinity, deformed in heart or mind, for I ask for nothing but what is right and what nature is bound to give to every man. As long as my aim is unattained, I shall look on myself as a child, and I shall lack proper self-confidence. To me a mistress means what the toga meant to the young Roman.

I see so many men, ignoble in every respect, who possess beautiful women whose lackeys they are scarcely worthy to be, that I blush for the women — and myself. To see women crazy about such cads as these, — who betray and despise them, — instead of giving themselves to some true and earnest young fellow who would think himself mighty lucky and who would worship them on bended knee, — such an one as myself, for instance, — gives me a very poor opinion of the sex. It is true that these cads crowd every drawing-room, show off before every beauty, and are always leaning over the backs of arm-chairs, while I stay at home, my face pressed against the window-pane, watching the river smoke and the mists rise, while I

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silently build in my heart the perfumed sanctuary, the wondrous fane in which I mean to place the future idol of my soul. A chaste and poetic occupation, for which women bear you no gratitude whatever.

Women care very little for mere contemplators, but greatly prize men who turn their thoughts into action. After all, they are right. Compelled by their education and their social position to be silent and to wait, they naturally prefer men who come to them and speak out; they it is who relieve them of a false and wearisome position. I feel the truth of this, yet never in this world shall I be able to do what I see many others do, — rise from my seat, cross the room, and go to say without warning to a lady, "Your dress becomes you divinely," or, "Your eyes are remarkably bright this evening."

All the same I must have a mistress. But who is to fill the post, I know not. Among the women I know, there is not one capable of doing it properly. I find in them but few of the qualities I insist upon. Those who are young enough fail in beauty or in sprightliness of wit; those who are both young and beautiful are either shockingly and repulsively virtuous, or do not enjoy the necessary freedom. Then there

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is always round such women a husband or brother, an aunt or mother, some relative, sharp-eyed and sharp-eared, who has either to be won over or thrown out of the window. Every rose has lice; every woman has a crowd of relatives who have to be carefully removed from about her, if one desires to pluck, some day, the fruit of her beauty. Even the country cousins, thrice removed, and whom one has never met, insist on maintaining the pristine immaculate purity of their dear cousin. That is sickening, and I should never be patient enough to remove all the weeds and cut away all the brambles which inevitably obstruct the approaches to a pretty woman.

I am not very fond of mammas, and I am still less fond of little girls. I must further confess that married women have but slight attraction for me. That kind of business means a mixing up and a confusion that disgust me; I cannot bear the idea of partnership. A woman who has both a husband and a lover is a prostitute as far as one, and often both, are concerned. Besides, I could not consent to make way for another man. My natural pride could not stoop so low. Never shall I leave because another fellow has come. Even if it meant loss of reputation for the woman,

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even had we to fight it out knife in hand, each with a foot on her body, — I should stay. Concealed staircases, cupboards, closets, and all the stage properties of adultery would be of little use to me.

I care very little for what is termed maidenly candour, innocence of youth, purity of heart, and other fine things which look very well in verse; I call them simply stupidity, ignorance, imbecility, or hypocrisy. Maidenly candour, which means sitting on the edge of a chair, elbows pressed close to the side, eyes fixed on the point of the waist, and not a word uttered save by leave of the grandparents; innocence, which has a monopoly of straight hair and white gowns; purity of heart, which wears high-necked dresses because it has not yet swelling bosom or rounded shoulders, these things do not, in truth, strike me as particularly attractive.

I care very little about teaching the rudiments to little fools. I am neither old enough nor corrupt enough to derive any pleasure from such an occupation, and besides I should but ill succeed in it, for I have never been able to teach anybody anything, even what I know best. I prefer women who read easily, for one gets more quickly to the end of the

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chapter, and in all things, but especially in love, one must consider the end. In this respect, I am not unlike those people who begin a novel at the end and read the last chapter first, going back afterwards, if so minded, to the first page. There is a charm about this way of reading and making love. Details are enjoyed more thoroughly when one is reassured about the outcome, and the inversion of the order brings about the unexpected.

So young girls and married women are out of the reckoning. It is therefore among widows that our deity is to be sought for. Alas! I much fear that, though widows only are left, it is not among them that we shall find what we want.

Were I to take to loving one of those drooping daffodils, wet with a warm dew of tears, and bending over the new marble tomb of a happily and recently deceased husband, I should certainly, before very long, be as wretched as the late spouse had been in his lifetime. However young and charming widows may be, they have a drawback from which other women are free: if one happens to lose their good graces for a moment, if but a cloud obscure love's azure, they at once remark with a distant and contemptuous air:

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"What is the matter with you to-day? You are exactly like my late husband; when we quarrelled he talked just as you are doing. Very curious, your look is the same, the sound of your voice the same; when you lose your temper you have no idea how like my husband you are — it is really startling."

Pleasant, is it not, to be spoken to like that? There are even some widows shameless enough to praise the late lamented as unblushingly as an epitaph, and who compare his physical and mental qualities with yours, much to your disadvantage. On the other hand, with women who have but one or several lovers, one enjoys the great comfort of never hearing one's predecessor spoken of, which is no small matter. Women are too careful of forms and conventionalities not to be most discreetly silent in such circumstances, and all matters of this sort are as speedily as possible relegated to the limbo of oblivion. It is a standing principle that one is always a woman's first lover.

I do not see what sound argument can be advanced against so well founded an aversion. I do not mean to imply that I consider widows entirely unattractive when young, pretty, and still in mourning. They have little languishing airs, ways of letting their arms

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fall, of bending their neck and of swelling out their bosoms like a forlorn turtle-dove; they have a whole series of delightful blandishments delicately attenuated by the fact of their mourning, — such a perfect understanding of the coquetry of broken hearts, sighs uttered so thoroughly at the right moment, tears that fall just when they should fall, and which cause the eyes to shine so brilliantly. Assuredly, next to wine, my favourite beverage is a beautiful, crystal-clear tear trembling on an eyelash, be it dark or fair. It is irresistible, and one does not resist. Then, mourning becomes women so well. Thanks to the black they wear, the fair skin becomes ivory, snow, milk, marble, anything you please that is white enough for the use of madrigal writers; the dark skin becomes merely nutbrown with a dash of colour and flame. It is great luck for a woman to go into mourning, and my reason for not marrying is a fear lest my wife should make away with me in order to wear mourning. All the same there are women who do not know how to turn their grief to account, and so weep that their nose becomes red and their face assumes the look of the masks on fountains. To weep fittingly calls for much charm and skill; lacking these, one risks remaining long inconsolable. However great, never-

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theless, may be the pleasure of causing an Artemisia to be unfaithful to the memory of her Mausoleus, I have quite made up my mind that I shall not select from among these lamenting ones the woman whose heart I shall ask for in exchange for mine.

I can hear you ask: "Whom, then, will you choose? You will have none of maid, wife, or widow. You do not care for mammas, and, I fancy, you do not care any more for grandmothers. Who the devil are you in love with?" That is exactly where the answer to the riddle comes in, and if I knew it I would not worry as much as I do. Up to this moment, I have loved no woman, but I have loved and still love *Love* itself. Though I have had no mistresses, though the women I have possessed have aroused nothing more than desire in me, love itself I have experienced and know. It was not this woman or that whom I loved, the one rather than the other, but a yet unseen woman who certainly exists somewhere, and whom I shall find, please God. I know just what she is like, and I shall easily recognise her when we meet.

I have often imagined the place where she lives, the dress she wears, the colour of her eyes and hair. Her voice is in my ear; her step I should know among a

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thousand, and if any one chanced to name her I should turn round, for she must bear one of the five or six names I have given her in fancy.

She is twenty-six; neither more nor less. She is no longer ignorant and not yet *blasée*. Her age is the right one for love as it should be, neither puerile nor libertine. She is neither tall nor short; I do not care for either a giantess or a dwarf. I want to have a goddess whom I can carry alone from the sofa to the bed, but I should dislike having to look for her in the bed. When she rises slightly on tiptoe her lips will be just the height of my kiss. That is the correct stature. As to her figure, she is plump rather than thin; I am a bit of a Turk on this point, and I should not fancy coming across the edge of a bone when seeking a soft roundness. A woman should be plump, of a firm plumpness like that of a peach on the point of complete ripeness, and that is the sort of plumpness my future mistress shall be of. She is fair, with black eyes, white-skinned as is a fair woman, and with a rich colour like a brunette, with something of flame and sparkle in her smile. Her lower lip somewhat full, her eye swimming in glistening moisture, her breasts small, round, and firm; her wrists slight, her hands long and dimpled: her gait un-

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dulating like an adder, hips full and undulating; her shoulders broad, and the back of the neck covered with fine hair — a type of beauty at once delicate and strong, refined and full of life, poetic and real; a *motif* of Giorgione's carried out by Rubens.

As for her dress, she wears a dress of scarlet or black velvet slashed with white satin or silver tissue, the bodice open in front, a great Medici ruff, a felt hat capriciously shaped, like that of Helena Systermans, and with long white feathers curled and crimped, a golden chain or a necklace of diamonds round her neck, and numerous large rings of various enamels on every finger of her hands.

I will not allow of a single ring or bracelet being wanting; her dress must be literally of velvet or brocade; at the most I would barely permit her to come down to satin. I prefer rumpling a silk skirt rather than a linen one, and to cause pearls and feathers to fall from the hair, rather than natural flowers or a mere knot of ribbon. I am well aware that what is underneath the linen skirt is often as attractive as what is under the silk skirt, but I prefer the latter. Thus it is that in my dreams I have often presented myself with many a queen, empress, princess, sultana, or famous

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courtesan for a mistress, but never with a *bourgeoise* or a shepherdess, and in my most erratic desires I have never taken advantage of any woman on a carpet of grass or in a bed of Aumale serge. In my opinion beauty is a diamond that should be set in gold. I cannot conceive a beautiful woman without a carriage, horses, lackeys, and all that goes with an income of a hundred thousand a year; between beauty and riches there is harmony; the one requires the other — a pretty foot must have a pretty shoe, and a pretty shoe needs carpets, carriages, and all the rest of it. A beautiful woman in mean clothes in a wretched house is, in my view, the most pitiable of sights, and I could feel no love for her. Only the rich and the handsome can be in love without being ridiculous or pitiable. At that rate few people have the right to be in love; I should be the very first barred out, and yet such is my belief.

We shall meet for the first time in the evening, when the sun is setting splendidly; the sky will glow with those light-yellow, orange, and pale-green tones one sees in the pictures of some of the old masters. There will be a great avenue of chestnut trees in bloom, and of aged elms full of wood-pigeons; glorious trees of a cool dark-green, shades full of mystery and

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dewy coolness; a few statues, a few marble vases standing out here and there in snowy whiteness against a background of verdure; a pool of water on which swims the usual swan, and at the very back of it all a *château* of brick and stone of the time of Henry IV., with its pointed slate roof, tall chimneys, vanes on every gable-end, tall, narrow windows. At one of these windows, leaning sadly on the balcony, the queen of my soul in the costume I described a moment ago. Behind her, a little negro holding her fan and her parrot. You see nothing is wanting to my fancy, and the whole business is sheer absurdity. The fair one lets fall her glove; I pick it up, kiss it, and return it to her. We fall to talking; I make a parade of all the wit I do not possess; I say charming things; charming things are said to me; I return others; it is a regular coruscation of witticisms. In a word, I am adorable and adored. The supper hour comes round; I am invited, and I accept. What a supper, O my friend! And what a cook my fancy can be! The wines sparkle in the crystal glasses; the pheasant, golden-brown, smokes on a blazoned dish. The feast lasts well into the night, and you need not be told that I do not return home to finish it. Now, is not that a good piece of imagina-

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tive work? Nothing could be simpler, and the only wonder is that it has not happened frequently.

Sometimes it is in a great forest. The hunt goes by, the horns sound, the pack is in full cry and flashes across the road; my beauty, in a riding habit, is mounted on a milk-white Turkish horse, very spirited, and very much excited. Although she is an excellent horsewoman, it plunges, caracoles, rears, and she finds it almost impossible to hold it in; it bolts and takes her straight to a precipice. I happen to be right on the spot. I stop the horse, catch in my arms my princess, who has fainted, bring her to, and escort her back to her *château*. What well-bred woman would refuse her heart to a man who had just saved her life? Not one; and gratitude is a short cut which speedily leads to love.

You must own, I think, that, when I become romanesque, I do not do it by halves, and that I am as crazy as it is given to man to be; and that is something, for there is nothing so disagreeable as a sensible craze. You must own, too, that when I write letters they are volumes rather than notes. I love to go beyond ordinary bounds in everything. That is why I love you. Do not laugh overmuch at all the nonsense I

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have scribbled for you. I cease scribbling to turn that nonsense into fact, for it all comes back to this, that I mean to have a mistress. I do not know whether she will prove to be the lady in the park or the lady in the balcony, but I am off to look for her. My mind is made up. Were she to conceal herself in the far confines of Cathay or Samarcand, I shall find her out. I will inform you of the outcome of my quest, whether it be success or failure. I hope it will be success; pray that it may, my dear friend. For my part, I am putting on my handsomest clothes, and I leave my house firmly determined not to re-enter it save accompanied by a mistress, conformable to my views. I have dreamed long enough: now for action.

P. S. Tell me if you know anything of little D——. What has become of him? No one here knows. Present my compliments to your good brother and all your family.

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II

WELL, my friend, I am at home again; I have not been to Cathay, Cashmere, or Samarcand, but I am bound to say that I have no mistress yet, although I had clasped my own hand and sworn a great oath that I would go to the world's end — I did not even go to the city's gates. I do not know how it comes about, but, the devil is in it, I have never been able to keep a promise made to any one, not even to myself. If I say, I shall go there tomorrow, you may be sure I shall stop at home; if I mean to go to church, the road gets tangled around my feet like a skein of thread, and I find myself in quite another place. I fast when it was my intention to enjoy an orgy, and so on. I therefore have come to the conclusion that what prevents my having a mistress is that I have resolved to have one.

I must relate my expedition to you in detail; it is well worth telling. I had spent that day two full hours in dressing. I had my hair curled, my small moustaches twisted and waxed, while the warmth of desire flushing somewhat my usually pale complexion,

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I really did not look badly. In short, after having carefully studied my appearance in the mirror from different points, to ascertain whether I was handsome enough and whether my mien was properly gallant, I resolutely sallied forth, head up, nose in the air, firm glance, hand on hip, and the heels of my boots clanking like a corporal's, brushing aside the *bourgeois*, and having a perfectly victorious and triumphant air.

I was like a new Jason going to the conquest of the Golden Fleece. But Jason was luckier than I, for besides carrying off the fleece, he also bore away a princess, and I — I have neither princess nor fleece.

So I went trotting through the streets, noting every woman, hastening to her and examining her closely, when she struck me as worth examining. Some assumed a highly virtuous air, and passed on without a look. Others were surprised at first, then smiled — if they had fine teeth. A few turned after a time to look at me when they thought I was not looking at them, and blushed crimson when they found my face close to theirs. The weather was fine, and crowds of people were out walking. And yet I must confess, spite of the respect I have for that interesting moiety of mankind whom we are in the habit of calling the fair sex,

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that out of one hundred women there was scarcely one that would pass muster. One had a moustache, another's nose was blue; others had red spots in place of eyebrows; another again had rather a good figure, but her face was blotched. Still another had a lovely head, but she could have scratched her ear with her shoulder; the perfect form and the softness of certain contours of a third would have shamed Praxiteles, but she skated along on feet the size of Turkish stirrups. Another displayed the most superb shoulders, but, on the other hand, the shape and size of her hands recalled the enormous scarlet gloves which glove-makers hang up as a sign; and, in general, the faces were so drawn, they were so faded, crinkled, and ignobly worn-looking through mean passions and mean vices. They bore such expressions of envy, wicked curiosity, avidity, bold coquetry. And a woman who is not handsome is uglier than a man who is not handsome.

I saw not one worth looking at, save a few grisettes; but with these it is not silk but linen you rumple, and that does not suit me. Of a truth, I believe man, and in man I include woman, is the ugliest creature on earth. It strikes me as very presumptuous that this quadruped that struts on its hind-legs should assume

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the highest rank in creation. A lion or a tiger is much handsomer than a man, and among these species many attain to the full beauty which pertains to the race, while with man this is extremely rare. How many a misshapen lout for one Antinous! How many a clumsy wench for one Phyllis!

I greatly fear, dear friend, that I shall never embrace my ideal, and yet it has in itself nothing extravagant or out of the common. It is not the ideal of a high-school boy. I do not ask for ivory globes, alabaster columns, or nets of azure; in making it up I have never made use of lilies, snow, roses, jet, ebony, coral, ambrosia, pearls, or diamonds; I let alone the stars of heaven and I did not drag in the sun unseasonably. My ideal is almost commonplace, so simple is it, and it seems as though one provided with a bag or two of crowns would find it ready to his hand in the very first bazaar of Constantinople or Smyrna. Probably it would cost me less than a thoroughbred horse or dog, and to think that I cannot manage to secure it! For I shall not secure it, I feel it. It is enough to make one swear, and I get into the wildest of rages.

As for you, you are not as crazy as I am; you are happy; you let yourself drift into your life without tak-

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ing the trouble to mould it, and you took things as they came. You did not look for happiness, and it sought you out. You love and are loved. I do not envy you, — do not think that, — but I do feel less joyous than I ought to be when I reflect on your happiness, and I remark with a sigh that I would fain enjoy a similar one.

It may be that happiness brushed by me, and that, blind fool that I am, I did not see it; it may be that the voice spoke in my ear, and that the noise of the tempests within me drowned it. It may be that I have been secretly loved by some humble heart which I have failed to appreciate, which I have broken; that I have myself been some one's ideal, the loved star of some suffering soul, a dream of the night, a thought of the day. Had I cast a glance at my feet, I might perchance have seen some fair Magdalen with her box of perfume and her hair cast to the winds. I went raising my hands to heaven, seeking to pluck the stars that escaped me, and disdainful of the modest daisy that opened its golden heart in the dewy grass.

I have made a serious blunder. I have asked of Love something else than love, something it could not give. I forgot that Love is nude, and failed to grasp

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the meaning of that splendid symbol. I asked of it brocade dresses, feathers, diamonds, a sublime mind, science, poetry, beauty, youth, supreme power — all that it has not. Love can offer but itself, and he who would draw aught else from it is not worthy of being loved.

And no doubt I was in too great a hurry; my time has not come. God, who gave me life, will not recall it before I have lived. What is the use of giving a stringless lyre to the poet, a loveless life to the man? God does not do such illogical things, and He will no doubt, at the right time, put in my way her I am to love and by whom I am to be loved. But why did love come to me before the mistress? Why should I thirst and have no spring to slake my thirst; or else, why can I not, like the birds of the desert, fly to the water springs? To me the world is a Sahara void of wells and date-palms. There is not in my life one shaded place where I can take shelter from the sun. I experience all the ardours of passion without its ecstasies and ineffable delights; I know its torments, its pleasures I ignore. I am jealous of the non-existent; I am troubled by the shadow of a shadow; I sigh I know not for what; I have sleepless nights which no

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fair apparition lightens; I shed tears that fall to earth unkissed away; I throw to the winds kisses that are not returned; I wear out mine eyes in trying to perceive afar a dim and deceiving form; I wait for what will not come, and anxiously count the hours as if I had a tryst to keep.

Wherever thou art, angel or demon, maid or courtesan, peasant or princess, whether thou comest from the North or the South, thou whom I know not and whom I love, do not keep me waiting longer, or the fire will consume the altar, and in the place of my heart thou shalt find but a heap of ashes grown cold. Descend from the sphere where thou art; leave the crystal skies, O Spirit of Consolation, and with thy mighty wings overshadow my soul. Come, come, thou whom I shall love, and let my arms, so long outstretched, at last close around thee! Golden gates of her palace, roll back on your hinges; humble latch of her cabin-door, be lifted up; separate, ye branches of the trees, ye brambles of the roads; be broken, spells of the turrets, charms of wizards; ye serried crowds, open up and let her pass!

If you come too late, ideal mine, I shall have no more strength to love you; my soul is like a dovecote

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full of doves — a desire flies away from it every hour of the day; the doves return to the cote, but desires never return to the heart. The azure vault of heaven is whitened by their innumerable flocks; they go through space from world to world, from heaven to heaven, seeking some love where they can rest for the night. Hasten, then, O my dream, or you will find in the empty nest but the broken shells of birds that have flown.

You are the only one, dear friend and companion of my childhood, to whom I can say such things. Write to me; tell me you are sorry for me, that you do not think me hypochondriacal; console me, for never did I stand in greater need of it. Happy they who have a passion they can satisfy! No bottle is cruel to the drunkard; he staggers from the tavern to the gutter, and is happier on his filth heap than a king on his throne. The voluptuary seeks facile loves or shameless excitements in the arms of courtesans; a painted cheek, a short skirt, an immodest bosom, a vile phrase, make him happy; his eye pales, his lip is wet, he reaches the highest degree of his form of happiness, he enjoys the ecstasy of his coarse voluptuousness. The gamester needs but the green cloth and a worn and greasy pack

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of cards to experience the keen anguish, the nervous spasms and the devilish delights of his horrible passion. These people can satiate or distract themselves — I cannot.

This feeling has so thoroughly laid hold of me that I have got to the point of almost not caring for art and finding no charm in poetry. What once delighted me now fails to impress me in the least.

I begin to believe I am wrong. I ask more of nature and society than they can give. What I am looking for does not exist, and I ought not to complain at not finding it. On the other hand, if the woman we love is not to be found in human shape, how comes it that we love her and not another, seeing that we are men and that our instinct ought irresistibly to lead us to love the other? Whence came to us the idea of this imaginary woman? Out of what clay have we moulded that invisible statue? Where did we find the feathers wherewith we have clothed our chimera? What mystic bird laid in some obscure corner of our soul the unperceived egg whence sprang our dream? Who is she, that abstract beauty, which we feel but cannot define? Why, in presence of a woman often charming, do we sometimes say she is beautiful, al-

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though we think her very ugly? Where is the ideal model, type, pattern which we use as a standard of comparison? For beauty is not an absolute idea, and contrast alone enables us to appreciate it. Was it in heaven that we beheld it, in a star, at a ball, under a mother's wing, like the sweet bud by the side of the full-blown rose? Was it in Italy or Spain, here or yonder, yesterday or long ago? Was it the adored courtesan, the popular singer, the prince's daughter? Was it a proud and noble head bending under the heavy diadem of pearls and rubies, or the young childish face showing between the nasturtiums and the morning glories at the window? To what school belonged the picture in which that beauty shone luminous out of the dark shadows? Did Raphael trace that outline which delights you? Did Cleomenes polish the statue you adore? Is it a Madonna or a Diana you are in love with? Is your ideal angel, sylph, or woman? Alas! it is something of all these, but it is none of these.

To Rubens belong that transparent tone, that charming, brilliant bloom, that flesh wherein course blood and life, that glorious fair hair that falls like a mantle of gold, the sparkling laughter, the love-provoking dimples, the strength and suppleness, the satin sheen, the well-

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filled lines, the plump arms, the firm and polished back, the splendid health. Raphael alone can have coloured with pale amber these most chaste lineaments, and none other but he curved these long, delicate, dark brows, and drew the lashes of these eyes so modestly cast down. Think you Allegri has had naught to do with your ideal? It is from him that the lady of your thoughts has filched that dead but warm pallor that transports you. She gazed long at his pictures in order to discover the secret of that ever radiant, angelic smile; the oval of her face, she has modelled it from the oval of a nymph or a saint. That voluptuously sweeping line of the hip comes from the sleeping Antiope. The hands, plump and delicate, might be claimed by Danaë or Magdalen. Dusty antiquity itself has furnished many of the elements that compose your youthful chimera. The strong and supple waist you passionately clasp in your arms was carved by Praxiteles. Yonder goddess purposely let the tips of her lovely foot emerge from the ashes of Herculaneum that your idol might not limp. Nature, too, has contributed her share. Here and there you have seen, through the prism of desire, an ivory brow pressed against a pane, lips smiling behind a fan. The hand

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told you of the shapely arm; the rounded ankle of the polished knee. What you could see was perfection; you took for granted that the rest resembled what you saw, and you completed it with bits of other beauties snatched elsewhere. Ideal beauty, as realised by painters, was yet insufficient, and you asked of the poets more graceful curves, more ethereal forms, diviner charms, more exquisite refinement. You prayed them to bestow on your phantom breath and speech, the fulness of their love, of their fancy, of their joy and sadness, of their melancholy and *morbidezza*, of their memories and their hopes, of their knowledge and their passion, of their mind and their heart. All this you took from them, and to it added, to fill up the impossible, your own passion, mind, fancy, and thought. The star lent its beams, the flower its scent, the palette its colours, the poet harmony, the marble form, and you desire.

How is it possible for a woman, a real woman, who eats, drinks, rises in the morning, goes to bed at night, adorable and gracious though she may be, to stand a comparison with such a creature? It is folly to expect that she should, and yet one does expect it and one hunts for her. Oh, strange blindness! How sublime, or ab-

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surd! I pity and admire those who pursue their dream through all reality, and who die happy if once they have kissed their chimera's lips. But what a dreadful fate is that of the Columbus who has failed to discover his New World, of the lover who has not met his mistress!

Were I a poet, I should sing — and a noble task it would be — those who have failed in life, whose bolts have not hit the mark, who died with the word untold, the hand not clasped that was meant for them; all that has missed its aim and passed away unperceived: the smothered fire, the mute, inglorious genius, the unknown pearl within the ocean's depths; all that has loved unloved in return, all that has suffered and been unpitied.

Plato was right indeed when he banished you from his republic, O poets! for ye have wrought us harm infinite. Our absinthe has been made more bitter because of your ambrosia; the vast horizons you have unrolled before us have made our life but more waste and barren; your dreams have made us fight our reality fiercely, and in the struggle our heart has been trampled and crushed by that great athlete.

Like Adam we have sat ourselves down at the foot of the walls of the Earthly Paradise, on the steps of

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the stairs that lead to the world you have created; we have seen through the rifts of the gate the flash of a light brighter than that of the sun; we have heard the faint scattered notes of a heavenly harmony. Whenever one of the elect enters or comes out in a flood of splendour, we crane forward to catch a glimpse of something through the open leaf. It is a fairy architecture that has no equal but in Arabian fairy tales. Columns innumerable, arches rising on arches, pillars twisted into spirals, wondrously carved foliage, openwork trefoils, porphyry, jasper, lapis lazuli, and more! — transparence and dazzling reflections, a profusion of strange gems, sardonyx, chrysoprase, aquamarine, iridescent opals, azerodrach; flashings of crystals, flames that make the stars grow pale, a luminous haze full of sound and dizziness — Assyrian luxury.

The leaf of the door closes; you see nothing more, and your eyes turn, full of burning tears, to this poor, pale, fleshless earth, to the ruined hovels, the ragged people, to your own soul, — that barren rock on which nothing grows, — all the wretchedness and all the sorrows of reality. Ah! if only we could fly thither; if only the steps of those stairs did not burn our

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feet! But, alas! the angels alone can climb Jacob's ladder!

What a lot is that of the poor man at the gate of the rich! What hideous irony is a palace opposite a hut, the ideal opposed to the real, poetry contrasted with prose! What bitter hatred must fill the heart of the wretched! What gnashings of teeth must sound at night on their miserable couch while the breeze carries to them the sound of the theorbo and the lute! Why have you lied unto us, poets, painters, sculptors, composers? Ye poets, why did you tell us your dreams? Ye painters, why did you preserve on the canvas that elusive phantom that rose and fell from your heart to your head with the throbbings of your veins, and why did you tell us, "This is a woman"? Wherefore, O sculptors, did you raise the marble from Carrara's depths and make it express forever and in the sight of all, your lightest and deepest desire? And you composers, why did you note the song of the stars and the song of the flowers in the shadow of night and note it down? Why have you written such sweet songs that the sweetest voice which whispers to us, "I love you," seems harsh as rasp of saw or croak of raven? Be ye accursed, ye impostors! and

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may the fire of heaven burn and destroy every painting and poem, every statue, and every composition. Ouf! that tirade is marvellous long and somewhat out of the epistolary style. What a screed!

I have largely indulged in lyrical rhapsody, most dear friend, and I have been imitating Pindar at prodigious length. All this is far removed from our subject, which is, if I remember rightly, the glorious and triumphant story of the knight Albert in pursuit of Daraïda, the most beautiful princess in the world, as our old romances have it. But the fact is, there is so little in the story itself that I am compelled to have recourse to reflections and digressions. I hope it will not always be so, and that before long the romance of my life will be more complex and involved than a Spanish *imbroglio*.

After wandering through street after street, I resolved to call on a friend of mine who was to present me in a house where, according to him, one met a host of lovely women, a collection of ideals, become real enough to satisfy a score of poets. All tastes can be suited; there are aristocratic beauties with eagle glance, sea-green eyes, Greek noses, proudly turned chins, queenly hands, and the walk of a goddess; silver

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lilies on a golden stem; soft-coloured, modest violets, sweet-scented, eye moist and cast down, swan neck, transparent skin; arch and piquant beauties; affected beauties; beauties of every sort; for that house is a veritable seraglio, bar the eunuchs and the kislar aga. My friend tells me that he has already had no less than five or six love affairs there. This amazes me and I greatly fear I shall not meet with such success. De C—— insists that I shall, and that sooner than I wish. He maintains that I have but one defect, which age and a knowledge of the world will soon cure — it is that I think too highly of woman and not enough of women. There may be some truth in this. He says that when I have rid myself of this defect I shall be perfectly lovable. Heaven grant it! Women surely feel that I despise them, for a compliment which they would think adorable and most charming, coming from another man, angers and displeases them, coming from me, as much as would the bitterest epigram. This is probably due to what de C—— reproaches me with.

My heart beat somewhat fast as we ascended the stairs, and I had scarcely mastered my emotion when de C——, nudging me, brought me face to face with

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a woman of thirty or thereabouts, rather handsome, dressed with quiet luxury and an extreme affectation of childish simplicity, which did not prevent her having painted herself as if she were a carriage-wheel. She was the mistress of the house.

De C——, in that thin and sarcastic voice so different from his habitual one, and which he uses in the world when he wants to charm, said to her, neither very low nor very loud, and with many demonstrations of ironic respect, through which contempt was plainly visible, —

"This is the young gentleman of whom I spoke to you the other day; a man of distinguished merit, of the best of families, whom I think you will surely be pleased to receive. That is why I have taken the liberty of presenting him to you."

"You did quite right, sir," replied the lady, with the most exaggerated airs and graces. Then she turned towards me and looked me over out of the corner of her eye like a skilful expert, in a way that made me blush to the ears.

"You may consider yourself as invited once for all, and you may come as often as you have an evening to waste."

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I bowed rather awkwardly, and stammered a few disconnected words, which assuredly did not give her a high opinion of my capacity. Then other guests entered and relieved me of the boredom inseparable from an introduction. De C—— drew me into a window recess and proceeded to scold me in proper fashion.

"What the devil! You will compromise me. I spoke of you as a very phœnix of wit, a man of maddest imagination, a lyric poet, transcendent and passionate in the extreme; and you stand there like a log, without a word to say. What poverty of resources! I thought you could talk more freely; come, let your tongue go; chatter much, if not wisely. There is no need of saying wise and sensible things; on the contrary, it might prove hurtful. Talk, that is the main thing; talk much, talk long; attract attention to yourself; cast aside all fear and modesty; bear well in mind that every one here is a fool, or almost a fool, and do not forget that an orator who desires to succeed cannot despise his audience too much. What think you of the mistress of the house?"

"I dislike her excessively, and although I spoke to her for barely three minutes, I was as much bored as if I had been her husband."

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"Ah! that is what you think of her?"

"Yes."

"Is your dislike of her wholly insurmountable? 'T is a pity. It would have been becoming in you to have her, even but for a month; it is the thing to do, and a young man of the right sort can be launched into society by her only."

"Well! I shall have her," said I, rather ruefully, "since have her I must. But is it as indispensable as you seem to think?"

"Why, yes. Most indispensable, and I shall tell you why. Mme. de Thémines is all the rage just now; she indulges in all the follies of the day to a marked degree; she sometimes indulges in to-morrow's follies, but never in yesterday's; she is thoroughly up to date. What she wears will be worn, and she never wears what has been worn. Besides, she is rich, and she dresses in the best style. She is not witty, but she knows thoroughly the jargon of society; she takes very strong fancies, but scarcely knows what deep attachment is. You may strike her fancy, but you will not touch her feelings. She is cold-hearted and lasciviously minded. If she has a soul, which is doubtful, it is of the blackest; she is capable of any wickedness or

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baseness, but she is very clever, and preserves appearances just so far as is necessary to prevent anything being proved against her. For instance, she will readily lie with a man, but will not write him the briefest note. So her most intimate female enemies can find nothing to say against her, save that she rouges too high, and that certain parts of her person are not, in fact, as rounded as they seem to be, — which is not true."

"How do you know it?"

"That's a funny question. As one knows that kind of thing, — by finding out for myself."

"So you have had Mme. de Thémines also?"

"Certainly. Why should I not have had her? It would have been most improper in me not to have her. She has done me great services, and I am very grateful to her."

"I do not quite understand what kind of services she can have done you — "

"Are you really a fool?" then said de C——, looking at me most quizzically. "Upon my word, I begin to think so. Must I enter into details? Mme. de Thémines has the well-deserved reputation of possessing special knowledge of certain matters, and a

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young man whom she has taken and kept for a time may boldly present himself everywhere, and he may be sure he will not be long without an affair; two affairs, indeed, rather than one only. Besides this ineffable advantage, there is another equally important, and that is that as soon as the ladies in that company see you have become Mme. de Thémines' official lover, then, even if they care not a straw for you, they will consider it a duty and a pleasure to carry you off from a woman so much the fashion as she is, and instead of the advances and attentions you would have to indulge in, you will only have the difficulty of making a choice, and you will of necessity become the aim of all imaginable lures and baits.

"However, if she is too repugnant to you, do not take her. You are not actually obliged to have her, although it would be polite and proper for you to do so. But choose speedily, and lay siege to one who most pleases you, or seems most likely to surrender easily; for delay will cost you the benefit of novelty, and the advantage derived from it during a few days over all the men who are here. None of these ladies believe in love affairs which spring from intimacy, and grow slowly under the influence of silence and respect; they

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prefer the sudden passion and occult sympathy, — a very clever invention which saves the boredom of resistance, and all the delays and repetitions which sentiment mingles with the romance of love, and which merely postpone its outcome. These ladies value their time highly, and it is apparently so precious to them that they would forever regret not having made use of every minute. It is impossible to praise too much their desire to oblige mankind; they love their neighbour as themselves, a most evangelical and meritorious action. They are exceedingly charitable, and nothing in the world would induce them to let a man die of despair.

"Some three or four of them must already be smitten with you, and, as a friend, I should advise you to urge your suit vigorously in that direction, rather than to fool away your time talking with me in the embrasure of a window, — which is not the way to get on."

"But, my dear de C——, I am quite a novice in such matters. I have not that knowledge of the world which enables one to distinguish at a glance a woman who is smitten from one who is not, and unless you aid me with your experience, I shall be apt to make startling mistakes."

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"Upon my word, you are uncommonly green, and I did not think it was possible to be pastoral and bucolic to such a degree nowadays. What the devil do you do with those great black eyes of yours, then, which, did you but know how to use them, would be irresistible? Just look yonder, in that corner near the mantelpiece, at that little lady in pink who is playing with her fan. She has been observing you through her glasses for the past fifteen minutes with the most significant attention and assiduity. She has not her match in being supremely indecent and nobly shameless. Women dislike her very much, for they despair of ever attaining to the same height of immodesty; but, on the other hand, men are very fond of her, and think her as piquant as a courtesan. It is true that she is charmingly depraved, witty, spirited, and capricious. She is an excellent mistress for a young man with prejudices. In a week she frees a conscience of all scruples and corrupts the heart so that you never will be ridiculous or given to elegy. She is inexpressibly positivist in all things; she goes to the root of a matter with a swiftness and accuracy that are amazing. She is the incarnation of algebra, — exactly what is needed for a dreamer and an enthusiast. She will

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soon cure you of your vague idealism, and thus do you a great service. Besides, she will do it with the greatest pleasure, for she instinctively loves to disenchant poets."

My curiosity being awakened by de C——'s description, I emerged from my retreat, and making my way through the groups, I approached the lady and looked at her very attentively. She was about twenty-five or twenty-six; her figure was small but well proportioned, though somewhat plump; her arm was white and dimpled, her hand rather fine, her foot pretty and indeed rather small, her shoulders rounded and shining, her bosom not very full, but conveying a very favourable idea of the unseen portions. Her hair was very glossy and of a blue-black like the wings of the jay; the corner of the eye slanting somewhat upwards, the nose thin, and the nostrils well open; moist, sensuous lips, a slight depression in the lower one, and almost imperceptible down at the corners of the mouth. And withal vivacity, animation, health, strength, and an indefinable expression of sensuality, cleverly tempered by coquetry and artifice that combined to form a most desirable person, and more than justified the very lively desires she had inspired and still excited.

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I wanted her, but I understood, nevertheless, that, however charming she might be, she was not the woman who would satisfy my longing and make me say, "At last I have a mistress!"

I returned to de C—— and said to him: "I rather like the lady, and I may come to terms with her. But before saying anything definite and binding, I wish you would be good enough to show me the indulgent beauties who have been good enough to be struck with me, so that I may choose. And you will oblige me further, since you are acting as my guide here, if you will say a few words about each and enumerate her defects and qualities; tell me how I am to approach them, and what tone I should adopt so as not to seem too countryfied or literary."

"Very willingly," said de C——. "Do you see that fair and melancholy swan-like creature who bends her neck so harmoniously, and moves her sleeves like wings? She is modesty itself, the most chaste and maidenly creature in the world; snow-white brow, heart of ice, glance of a Madonna, innocent smile, white dress, and white soul. She never wears in her hair aught but orange blossoms or water-lily leaves, and but a thread holds her to this earth. She has

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never had an evil thought, and has not the faintest idea of the difference between a man and a woman. The Blessed Virgin would be a Bacchante in comparison with her, but all the same she has had more lovers than any woman I know, and I have known many. Pray examine that discreet lady's bosom — it is really a masterpiece, for it is indeed difficult to exhibit as much while concealing more — and tell me whether, with all her reservations and her prudery, she is not ten times more indecent than the worthy lady on her left who simply displays a couple of hemispheres that, were they put together, would form a full-sized globe, or than the other on her right, with her dress cut down to her stomach and who is parading her flat chest with delightful intrepidity? I am greatly mistaken if that maidenly creature has not already calculated in her own mind how much love and ardour may be inferred from your pale complexion and your black eyes. I say this, because she has not once looked our way, — apparently, at least; for she is so skilful in the use of her eyes, and she can look so cleverly out of the corners of them that nothing escapes her. You would swear she can see with the back of her head, for she knows perfectly well what is going on

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behind her. She is a female Janus. If you desire to succeed with her, you must put aside loud and domineering ways; speak to her without looking at her, without a gesture, in a contrite attitude and in a subdued and respectful tone. You may then say anything you please, provided you veil it properly, and she will permit you the utmost freedom of speech to begin with, and of action afterwards. But be careful to roll your eyes tenderly when she is looking down, and talk to her of the delights of platonic love and the interchange of souls while indulging in the least platonic and the most matter-of-fact gestures. She is very sensual and susceptible; kiss her as much as you please, but even when she is wholly giving herself, do not forget to call her *madam* every minute. She quarrelled with me because, being in bed with her, I addressed her familiarly. I can tell you that she is not an honest woman for nothing."

"I do not feel much tempted, after what you have told me, to try my chances with her. A prudish Messalina! it is a novel and monstrous combination."

"A combination as old as the world, my dear fellow; met with every day, so common is it. You are wrong not to settle on this one. She has a great charm about

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her; one always feels with her as if one were commiting a mortal sin, and the least kiss appears absolutely damning, while with others one has scarcely the sensation of venial sin, and often, indeed, no sensation of sin at all. Hence I kept her as my mistress much longer than any other. She would still be my mistress, had she not herself thrown me over; she is the only woman who ever forestalled me, and I rather respect her on that account. She has a most refined delicacy in her voluptuousness, and the rare art of seeming to yield reluctantly what she grants most readily, so that the gift of her favours has all the charm of rape. You will meet in society some nine or ten lovers of hers who will pledge their honour that she is the most virtuous creature living. She is exactly the opposite. It is very interesting to study that virtue in bed. Now as you are forewarned you run no danger and will not be fool enough to fall really in love with her."

"How old is this marvellous woman?" asked I, for I could not make it out, even after observing her most carefully.

"You may well ask her age. It is a mystery known to God alone. Even I, who pride myself on telling a

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woman's age within a minute of the correct time, I have never been able to make out hers. But, roughly speaking, I should say she is anywhere from eighteen to thirty-six. I have seen her in full dress, in undress, in her night-dress, and I cannot tell you anything on that point. My skill fails me. She seems to be most likely eighteen, and yet she cannot be that. She has the outward appearance of a virgin, and the soul of a prostitute, and it takes much time or genius to become so thoroughly and speciously corrupt as she is. It takes a heart of bronze in a breast of steel; she has neither, and so I judge she is thirty-six, but the truth is I do not know at all."

"Has she no intimate friend who could enlighten you?"

"No; she came to this place two years ago, from the provinces or abroad, I forget which; an admirable condition if a woman knows how to profit by it. With such a figure as hers, she may claim any age and have it reckoned only from the day of her arrival here."

"Very pleasant indeed, especially when no impertinent wrinkle appears to give you the lie, and Time, the great destroyer, is good enough to lend itself to such an alteration in a certificate of baptism."

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He showed me several others who, he affirmed, would favourably entertain whatever requests I might make of them and would treat me with singular philanthropy. But the lady in pink at the corner of the mantelpiece and the modest dove who formed a contrast to her were incomparably superior to all the others, and if the two had not all the qualities I insist upon, they, apparently at least, enjoyed some of them.

I talked with them the whole evening, especially with the dove-like one, and was careful to utter my remarks in the most respectful fashion. Although she scarcely looked at me once, I thought at times I saw her eyes shine under their veiling eyelashes, and when I ventured on some rather free gallantries — clothed in the most modest of gauze — I saw her skin flush softly and slightly, with an effect not unlike that produced by a rosy liquor poured into a translucent cup. Her replies were usually sober, temperate, but keen and barbed, suggesting much more than they expressed. And withal reservations, half-spoken thoughts, indirect allusions, each syllable fraught with meaning, every silence pregnant with purpose — nothing could be more diplomatic and delightful. Nevertheless, though I

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enjoyed it at the time, I could not long bear with that sort of conversation. One has to be constantly on guard and wide-awake, and what I most prize in a talk is ease and familiarity.

First, we spoke of music, and were naturally led to talk of the Opera, then of women, and finally of love, which is the subject of all others in which it is easiest to pass from the general to the particular. We rivalled with each other in the expression of lofty sentiments; you would have laughed had you heard me. Amadis on Poverty Rock was but a passionless wight compared with me. We talked of generosity, self-denial, devotion, in a way that would have brought the blush of shame to the cheek of the late Curtius the Roman. Honestly, I did not believe I was capable of talking such transcendental bosh and bathos. Does it not strike you as most comical, most buffoon that I should be indulging in the most superfine quintessence of platonism? And, by Jove! you should have seen my devout mien, my sanctimonious and demure ways. I seemed to be perfectly innocent about it, and any mother who had happened to hear me talk would not have hesitated to let me go to bed with her daughter, any husband would have confided his wife to me. It is the even-

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ing of my life on which I had the most virtuous air, and on which I was least virtuous. I thought it was a good deal more difficult to be hypocritical and to say things you do not believe. Either it must be quite easy or I have a fine turn for it, since I succeeded so well at the first attempt. The truth is that I am pretty successful at times.

As for the lady herself, she said many things very cleverly put, which, spite of the candid way in which she enunciated them, proved that she was consummately experienced. You cannot imagine how subtle were the distinctions she made. She would split a hair in three parts and beat all angelic and seraphic doctors with their own weapons. For the rest, judging from her speech, it is impossible to believe that she has even a shadow of a body. She is so immaterial, vaporous, ideal as fairly to stagger you, and if de C—— had not warned me of the ways of the creature, I should have certainly despaired of success and shamefacedly kept away from her. And really, when a woman tells you during a couple of hours, in the airiest way, that love lives only on privations and sacrifice and other pretty things of the kind, can you reasonably hope to persuade her one day to get in between a couple of sheets with

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you, in order to warm each other's complexions, and to see if you are built alike?

In a word, we parted very good friends and congratulated each other on the elevation and purity of our sentiments.

You will readily divine that my conversation with the other was entirely different. We laughed as much as we talked. We made fun, and very wittily, of every woman present, or rather I ought to say she made fun, as a man can never do that well of a woman. For my part, I listened and approved, for it is impossible to sketch more cleverly and to paint more brilliantly; it was the most amusing collection of caricatures I have ever seen. Through the exaggeration one felt the underlying truth. De C—— was right; that woman's mission is to disenchant poets. She bears about with her a prosaic atmosphere in which no poetic idea can live. She is charmingly and sparklingly witty, and yet, in her society, vulgar and ignoble thoughts alone occur to me. While speaking to her I felt the maddest desire to do things incongruous and impossible to do where we were, such as to call for wine, get drunk, plant her on my knee, kiss her bosom, pull up her petticoats and see if she wore her garter above or below

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the knee, to sing an obscene refrain, smoke a pipe, smash windows, and I know not what else. The animal, the brute in me was aroused; I would have unhesitatingly spat on Homer's Iliad and knelt to a ham. I now perfectly understand the allegory of Ulysses' companions turned into swine by Circe. She was probably a trollop, like my little lady in pink.

I am ashamed to say it, but I positively enjoyed my descent into beastliness; I not only did not struggle against it, but helped it on with all my strength, so natural is corruption to man, and so much slime is there mixed with the clay of which he is made.

I did for a moment fear this growing leprosy and tried to leave my corrupter, but I seemed to be sunk in the floor up to the knees, and, as it were, nailed to the spot.

At last I managed to leave her, and the night being far gone, I returned home in great perplexity and trouble of mind, not knowing very well what was best for me to do. I hesitated between the prudish and the lascivious one. The one seemed voluptuous to me; the other piquant, and, after a most thorough self-examination, I ascertained, not that I was in love with both, but that I desired to have both, as much the one as the

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other, and earnestly enough to be preoccupied and dreamy about them.

In all probability, my dear friend, I shall have one of these women, possibly both, and yet I confess that possessing them will but half satisfy me. It is not that they lack good looks, but at sight of them nothing within me called out, nothing beat high, nothing said, "It is she." I did not recognise them. And yet, as far as birth and beauty go, I do not suppose I can do much better, and de C—— advises me to seek no further. I shall certainly do so, and one of them shall be my mistress or the devil shall have me, ere long. Deep down in my heart, however, a secret voice reproaches me with being false to my love and with being stayed by the first smile of a woman for whom I care nothing, instead of seeking on without rest through the world, in convents and places of ill-fame, in palaces and inns, her who has been created for me and whom God means me to have, be she princess or servant, nun or paramour.

Then I repeat to myself that I dream dreams, and that it matters very little, after all, whether I go to bed with one woman rather than another; that this earth will not, on that account, change its course by a single

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line, and that the four seasons will not alter their order in consequence; that nothing is more indifferent to me and that it is very foolish in me to allow myself to be bothered by such nonsense; that is what I tell myself, but, say what I please, I am neither resolved nor at peace.

The reason of this may be that I live much to myself and that the slightest details in a life as monotonous as mine is assume an exaggerated importance. I listen too much to myself as I live and think; I hear the throbbing of my veins, the beating of my heart; by dint of attention I free my most impalpable thoughts from the mists in which they float, and I incarnate them. If I were more a man of action I should not notice all these small matters, and I should not have time to examine my soul with a microscope, as I do all day long. The bustle of action would drive away that swarm of idle fancies which flutter in my brain and daze me with the buzzing of their wings. Instead of chasing visions, I should take hold of realities; I should ask of women no more than they can give — pleasure; and I would not seek to clasp an imaginary, fantastic ideal adorned with vague perfection. That intense tension of my soul's eye fixed upon an invisible object has spoiled my

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sight. I cannot see what is, by dint of having gazed on what is not, and my sight, so keen to perceive the ideal is quite short for reality; for instance, I have known women whom everybody declared to be charming and who appear to me to be the very opposite. I have greatly admired paintings generally considered poor, and eccentric or unintelligible verse has often pleased me more than the most neatly turned productions. I should not be a bit surprised if, after having so long sighed to the moon and stared at the stars, after having written so many elegies and sentimental addresses, I were to fall in love with some vile light o' love or some ugly old woman — it would be a pretty come down. It may be that reality will take this method of punishing me for my neglect of it. Would it not be a sweet thing if I were to fall madly in love with some kitchen wench or other or some wretched dolt? Can you see me twanging a guitar under a kitchen window and supplanted by a scullion carrying the pet dog of an old dowager who is losing her last tooth? Perhaps, too, finding no one in this world worthy of my love, I shall end by worshipping myself, as did the late Narcissus, of selfish memory. To ward off such a misfortune I look into every glass and brook I come

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across. In truth, thanks to excess of dreaming and eccentricities, I have a great dread of falling into the monstrous and abnormal. It is a serious matter, that calls for care. Good-bye, dear friend; I am off to the pink lady's house for fear of yielding to my usual contemplations. I fancy we shall not bother much with entelechy, and that if we do anything it will certainly not be in the line of spiritualism, although the lady is very witty. I carefully roll up and put away in a drawer the pattern of my ideal mistress so that I shall not try it on this one. I mean to enjoy quietly the beauty and the merit she possesses. I mean to let her be dressed in a gown fitted to her, without trying to fit to her the garment which I have cut out beforehand, in case of need, for the lady of my thoughts. These be wise resolves; I know not whether I shall keep to them. Once more, adieu.

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III

I AM the acknowledged lover of the lady in pink; it is almost a profession, an office, and gives one a standing in society. No longer do I look like a schoolboy in quest of successes among grandmothers, and who dares not repeat a madrigal to a woman under a hundred years of age. I observe that since I have been installed, I am much more thought of, and all women speak to me with jealous coquetry and put themselves out for me. Men, on the contrary, are cooler, and in the few words we exchange there is a touch of hostility and constraint; they feel that in me they have a rival already to be feared, one who may yet become still more redoubtable. I have learned that several of them had severely criticised my mode of dress, and had said that it was too effeminate; that my hair was too glossy and curled with more care than was proper; that this, joined to my beardless face, made me look ridiculously like a girl; that I affected the use of rich and brilliant stuffs which smacked of the stage and were fitter for an actor than a man, — in short, all the commonplaces uttered by those who want

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to be dirty and to wear mean and ill-cut clothes. But all these remarks are like water on a duck's back, for all the ladies think my hair the most beautiful in the world, my refinement in dress in the very best taste, and they appear very much disposed to reward me for the trouble I take to please them, as they are not fools enough to believe that all this elegance is intended merely to gratify my own love of adornment.

Our hostess at first manifested some pique at my choice, supposing that I would necessarily single her out, and for a few days she testified on this account a certain bitterness — towards her rival alone; for she treated me just as before — which came out in "my dears," spoken in that dry, clear-cut fashion which women alone possess, and by some unpleasant remarks about her dress made in as loud a voice as possible; as, for instance, "Your hair is dressed too high and not at all becomingly for your face;" or, "Your dress does not fit under the arms; who made that gown for you?" or again, "Your eyes look very tired; I think you are quite changed;" and a thousand other little remarks; to which the other never failed to reply with all desirable malice when

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opportunity offered, and if the opportunity was slow in coming, she made one for herself and repaid with usury what she had received. But ere long, some other individual having attracted the attention of the disdained infanta, the little war of words ceased and the usual peace was restored.

I told you briefly that I am the declared lover of the lady in pink, which is not enough for so methodical a man as you. No doubt you will inquire her name. That I will not tell you; but if you like, for the convenience of my story and in memory of the colour of the dress in which I first saw her, we shall call her Rosette. It is a pretty name; it was my little dog's name.

You will want to know in detail, for you like accuracy in such matters, the story of my loves with this fair Bradamante, and the successive steps by which I passed from the general to the particular, and from the condition of mere spectator to that of actor; how from onlooker I turned into a lover. I shall gratify your wish with the greatest pleasure. There is nothing sinister in our love tale; it is rose-coloured, and the only tears shed in it are tears of pleasure; it has neither repetitions nor prosy passages, and it hast-

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ens to the end with the speed and haste so strongly recommended by Horace, — a regular French novel, in fact.

Nevertheless, do not take it for granted that I stormed the position at the first assault. My princess, though very tender-hearted towards her subjects, is not as lavish of her favours as one might believe at first; she knows their worth too well not to make you pay for them, and she also knows what a sharp spur to desire is a little delay, the relish which partial resistance gives to pleasure, for her to yield at the outset, however strong the fancy she may have taken to you.

If I am to tell you the story at length, I shall have to go back somewhat. I related to you pretty fully the account of our first meeting. I met her again once or twice in the same house, three times perhaps; then she invited me to her home. You will readily understand that I required no pressing. I called not too often at first, then a little oftener, then still oftener, and finally as often as I felt like it, and I am bound to confess I felt like it three or four times a day. The lady always received me, after a few hours' absence, as if I had just returned from the East Indies. I felt this, of course, deeply and had to show my gratitude by saying the

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most complimentary and tender things to her, and she replied as best she could.

Rosette — since we have agreed to call her so — is a very clever woman, who thoroughly understands men. Although she postponed the end of the chapter for some time, I was not once annoyed with her, which is absolutely amazing, for you know how furiously wrathy I become when I do not at once obtain what I desire, and when a woman resists longer than the period I have settled for her in my own mind. I do not know how Rosette managed it; at our very first meeting she made me understand that she would be mine, and I was more sure of it than if I had had her promise in writing under her own hand and seal. You may think that the boldness and freedom of her manner gave free play to audacious hopes, but I do not think that is the real reason. I have met women whose astonishing freedom dispelled the very shadow of a doubt, and who did not so impress me, and in whose company I experienced most uncalled-for timidity and anxiety.

The cause of my being usually much less amiable to the women I wish to possess than to those who are indifferent to me is the passionate expectation of an op-

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portunity, and the uncertainty I feel concerning the success of my project. I become sombre and fall into a dreamy state that deprives me of many of my advantages as well as of my presence of mind. When I see fleeing by, one after another, hours which I had intended to devote to a far different purpose, I become angry in spite of myself, and I cannot help saying very dry, harsh, occasionally even brutal things, which set me back ever so far. With Rosette this feeling has never arisen in me; never, when she was resisting most vigorously, have I thought that she desired to avoid my love. I quietly allowed her to show off all her little coquetries, and patiently bore with the rather prolonged delays which it pleased her to indulge in at the expense of my passion. Her rigour had something charming about it which consoled me so far as consolation was possible, and even in her Hyrcanian cruelties I perceived a substratum of humanity which prevented my being greatly afraid. Honest women, even when least honest, have a sour and disdainful manner which is perfectly unbearable to me. They seem to be always ready to ring and have you kicked out by their lackeys, and I really think that a man who takes the trouble to pay court to a woman (which is

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not as pleasant an occupation as people believe) does not deserve to be looked at in such a fashion.

Dear Rosette never looks so, and I assure you she gains by it. She is the only woman in whose company I have really been myself, and I am conceited enough to say that I never showed to better advantage. My wit exhibited itself freely, and the aptness and spirit of her replies made me feel myself wittier than I believed I was, and wittier, perhaps, than I really am. It is true that I did not indulge in much lyrism, — that is scarcely possible with her, although she does not lack a certain feeling for poetry, in spite of what de C—— said; but she is so full of life, strength, and energy, she seems to be so thoroughly in the right place in the atmosphere in which she lives, that one does not feel like having to ascend into the clouds. She fills real life so pleasantly and makes it so delightful to herself and others that fancy can offer you nothing better.

Here is indeed a miracle! I have known her for nearly two months and during that time I have experienced weariness only when away from her. You will acknowledge that to produce such an effect she can be no ordinary woman, since it is usually the contrary

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one which women have on me and I am fonder of them when away than when near them.

Rosette is the best-tempered woman on earth — with men, of course, for with her sex she is as bitter as the devil. She is bright, quick, alert, ready to do anything, very original in her mode of speech, and has always some unexpected pleasantry ready; she is a charming companion, a handsome comrade with whom one goes to bed, rather than a mistress, and if I were somewhat older and somewhat less romanesque, I should not care a rap, and I should even consider myself the most fortunate of mortals. But — but, — that particle bodes no good, and this devilish little restrictive word is unfortunately the most frequently used in all human tongues, — but I am a fool, a dolt, a goose, for I am never satisfied and seek the impossible; so that instead of being quite happy, I am only half happy. To be half happy is a good deal in this world, and yet it strikes me as insufficient.

Everybody thinks I have a mistress, desired by several who envy me her possession, disdained by none. Apparently, therefore, my wish is fulfilled and I have no right to quarrel with fate. All the same I do not feel as if I had a mistress; my reason understands that I

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have one, but I do not feel it, and if any one were to ask me unexpectedly whether I have one, I believe I would say no. Yet the possession of a beautiful, young, and clever woman is what, in all ages and all countries, has been and is called having a mistress, and I do not believe there is any other way of having one. Still, I have the queerest doubts on the point, and to such a degree that if a number of people agreed to maintain to me that I am not Rosette's favoured lover, I should, spite of the plainest evidence to the contrary, end by believing them.

Do not let what I have said lead you to think that I do not love her, or that she is in any respect repugnant to me. On the contrary, I am very much in love with her and think her what everybody must think her, a pretty and piquant creature. But I simply feel that I do not possess her, that is all; and this maugre the fact that no woman has ever given me so much pleasure and that, if I have known sensual delight, it is while in her arms. A single kiss from her, the most chaste caress, makes me tremble from head to foot and drives all the blood to my heart. Reconcile these things if you can. The truth is as I tell it you. But the heart of man is full of such incongruities, and if we had to

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reconcile all the contradictions it contains, our work would be cut out for us.

How does this come about? Really I cannot tell.

I see her all day long, and all night long, if I am so minded. I caress her as much as I like; I have her nude or dressed, in town or in the country. Her good-nature is inexhaustible, and she thoroughly enters into my capricious fancies, however extraordinary they may be. One evening I wished to possess her in the very middle of the drawing-room, with the chandelier and sconces lighted, a fire on the hearth, the arm-chairs arranged in a circle as if for a large evening reception, she in her ball-dress, with her bouquet and her fan, all her diamonds round her neck and on her fingers, feathers in her hair, in the most splendid toilet, and I dressed as a bear. She consented.

When all was ready the servants were greatly surprised to receive orders to close the doors and to admit no one; they could not make head or tail out of it, and went off with a wondering, stupid look which made us laugh heartily. They certainly thought their mistress was crazy, but what they thought or did not think mattered little to us.

That was the funniest evening I ever spent. Can

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you imagine how I looked with a plumed hat under one paw, rings on all my claws, and a silver-hilted, blue-ribboned small sword? I drew close to my beauty, and after bowing most gracefully I sat down by her and laid siege to her in the most approved fashion. The perfumed madrigals, the exaggerated compliments which I paid her, the regulation jargon, became more striking uttered through my bear's-head; for I had a splendid bear's-head of painted cardboard, which I soon was forced to throw under the table, so adorable was my goddess that evening, and so greatly did I desire to kiss her hand and more than her hand. The bear-skin speedily took the same road as the head, for not being used to play Bruin, I was stifling inside my furs. Then, as you will readily believe, the ball-dress had a time of it. The feathers fell like snow around my beauty, the shoulders soon showed out of the sleeves, the breasts out of the stays, the feet out of the shoes, the legs out of the stockings; the broken necklaces rolled on the floor, and I do not believe a new dress was ever more pitilessly crushed and rumpled. It was of silver gauze, with an underskirt of white satin. On this occasion Rosette displayed heroism superior to her sex, which gave me the highest opinion of her.

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She witnessed the destruction of her toilet as if she were a disinterested spectator, and did not for a single moment appear to regret her dress and her lace. On the contrary, she was madly excited and herself helped to tear and break whatever could not be undone or unhooked quickly enough to satisfy her or me. Do you not agree that this trait is fine enough to be preserved in history alongside of the most brilliant deeds of the heroes of antiquity? The greatest proof of love a woman can give a man is not to say to him, "Take care not to rumple me or to spot my dress" — especially if the dress is new. A new gown is a greater guarantee of security to a husband than is generally recognised. Either Rosette must fairly worship me, or as a philosopher she is superior to Epictetus.

All the same, I think I more than paid Rosette for her gown, in money which, though not current among tradesmen, is none the less esteemed and prized. So great heroism merited such a recompense. Besides, like the generous woman she is, she gave me as good as she got. I enjoyed the keenest delight, almost convulsive and such as I did not suppose I was capable of experiencing. Her sounding kisses mingling with loud laughter, her eager caresses, the strong and irritating

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lust, pleasure which dress and place prevented being had to the full, but keener a thousand times for these obstacles, acted so much on my nerves that I had spasms, from which I recovered with some difficulty.

It is impossible to describe Rosette's tender and proud look as she sought to make me regain consciousness, and the mingling of joy and anxiety in her manner as she worked over me. Her face shone with delight at having produced such an effect on me, while her eyes, filled with sweet tears, testified to the fright my indisposition gave her and to the interest she took in my health. Never did she appear so fair as at that moment. There was something so chaste and maternal in her glance that I completely forgot the exceedingly anacreontic scene which had just occurred, and knelt before her as I begged leave to kiss her hand, which she, with singular gravity and dignity, allowed me to do.

Certainly that woman is not so depraved as de C—— maintains, and as she has often seemed to me to be. It is her mind, not her heart, that is corrupted.

I have described this scene as I might describe a score of others. It strikes me that one may, after that, and without being conceited, believe one's self a woman's lover. Well, that is exactly what I do not. I had

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scarcely reached home before this thought again seized on me and began to worry me as usual. I remembered perfectly all I had done and seen done. The slightest gestures and attitudes, the least details stood out clearly in my memory. I recalled everything, even the faintest changes of tone of her voice and the indefinable gradations of voluptuousness; only, I did not feel that these things had happened to me rather than to any one else. I was not sure that the whole affair was not an illusion, a phantasm, a dream, or else something I had read somewhere, or even a story imagined by myself, as I often imagine them. I trembled lest I should be the victim of my own credulity or of some practical joke, and, spite of the testimony of my fatigue and the physical proofs that I had spent the night out, I could readily have believed that I had turned in at my usual time and slept until morning.

It is most unfortunate that I cannot be morally certain of that of which I am physically certain. Usually things are the other way, and the fact is a proof of the idea. I wish it could be so in my case, but it is of no use. Queer as the fact may seem, it is a fact none the less. It depends on me, up to a certain point, to have a mistress, but I cannot, though I have

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one, bring myself to believe that I do have her. If I lack the necessary faith, even for so evident a matter, it is just as impossible for me to believe in so simple a fact as for some one else to believe in the Trinity. Faith is not to be acquired; it is a downright gift, a special favour from Heaven.

Never did any one desire as keenly as I to live the lives of others and to assimilate another nature; and never did any one fail more completely. Do what I may, other men are to me phantoms almost, and I do not realise their existence; yet I do not lack the wish to know their life and to share in it. It arises from a lack of real sympathy for anything. The existence or non-existence of a person or thing does not interest me sufficiently to affect me in a tangible and convincing manner. The sight of a real man or woman leaves in my mind no deeper trace than the fantastic vision of a dream. There moves around me a world of pale shadows and of seemings, false or true, whose low murmur I hear and among whom I am absolutely isolated, for not one influences me for good or evil, and they appear to me to be of a nature different from mine. If I speak to them and they reply with an approach to common-sense, I am as

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much surprised as if my cat or my dog were suddenly to speak and take part in the conversation. The sound of their voices always amazes me, and I am not far from believing that they are merely fugitive appearances, and I the objective mirror. Whether I am better or worse than they, I assuredly do not belong to their species. At times I recognise but One as superior to myself; at others I think I am scarce the equal of the cockroach under its stone, or the mollusc clinging to the rock; but no matter what may be my state of mind, I can never persuade myself that men are really my fellows. When I am addressed as "sir," or when some one speaking of me says, "that man," it strikes me as very strange. My name itself seems assumed, and not my true name; yet, speak it as low as you please, in the midst of the greatest din, and I turn round suddenly with convulsive, feverish vivacity, which I have never thoroughly understood. Is it because I fear to find an opponent or an enemy in that man who knows my name and to whom I am no longer merely one of the crowd?

It is especially when living with a woman that I have most felt how irresistibly my nature rebels at any union or mingling with another. I am like a drop of

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oil in a glass of water. Stir as you please, you will never get the one to mix with the other; it will break up into an infinite number of globules, which will unite and rise to the surface at the first opportunity; a drop of oil in a glass of water — that is my whole story. Even voluptuousness, that diamond chain which binds all beings; that devouring fire which melts the rocks and metals of the soul and makes them fall back in a rain of tears, just as material fire melts iron and granite, has never, powerful though it be, tamed or softened me. I have highly developed senses, but my soul is hostile to its mate, my body, and the unhappy pair, like all legal or illegal couples, lives in a constant state of warfare. A woman's arms, said to be the fastest bonds on earth, are but slight ties for me, and I have never been further from my mistress than when she was pressing me to her heart. I choked, that was all.

How often have I grown angry with myself, and what efforts have I not made to become different! How hard have I tried to be tender, loving, passionate! How often have I dragged up my soul by force to my lips in the midst of a kiss? Do what I would, I no sooner released my grasp than it fled, wiping away the kiss. It is torture to that unhappy soul to be

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compelled to be present at the debauches of my body, and to sit down constantly to feasts at which it starves!

I determined, once for all, to try with Rosette whether or not I am absolutely unsociable, and whether I can become sufficiently interested in another's life to believe in it. I have carried my experiments to the point of exhaustion, and my condition of doubt is not much changed. With her, pleasure is so intense that my soul is often somewhat interested, if not touched, and this interferes to a certain extent with the accuracy of my observations. In the end I noticed that the enjoyment was skin-deep and merely superficial, the soul's participation in it being merely that of curiosity. I enjoy myself because I am young and lusty, but I, and not any one else, am the source of the pleasure I feel. Its cause is in me rather than in Rosette.

Try as hard as I may, I cannot go out of myself for a single moment. I remain what I am always, — an exceedingly weary and wearisome being, in whom I take no pleasure. I cannot manage to get an altruistic idea in my head, an altruistic feeling in my soul, to feel in my own body the pain or pleasure felt by some one else. I am prisoned within myself, and invasion of my being is impossible. The prisoner seeks

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to escape; the walls would gladly fall in ruins, the gates open to let him pass, but some fatal power keeps the stones in their places and the bolts in their slots. It is as impossible for me to let any one into myself as for me to enter into any one else. I can neither pay nor receive visits, and I live in saddest isolation in the midst of a crowd; my bed may be tenanted, but my heart is always empty.

Why can we not add a single mite, a single atom to our being? Why can we not make the blood of others flow in our veins? Why must we always see with our eyes alone, — no more distinctly, no farther, not otherwise? Why must we hear sounds with the same ears and the same emotion, touch with the same fingers, perceive varying things with an unvarying organ, be condemned to the same tone of voice, to the recurrence of the same inflections, the same terms, the same words, and be unable to escape, to avoid self, to take refuge in some corner where it will not follow? Why must we ever keep our own self, dine and sleep with it, be the same man to twenty different women, be necessarily, in the most striking scenes of our life drama, the same unavoidable personage whose lines we know by heart, think the same things, and dream the

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same dreams? Oh, the weariness of it! the torture of it!

I have longed for the horn of the Tangut brothers, the cap of Fortunatus, the wand of Abaris, the ring of Gyges. I would have given my soul to snatch the magic wand from a fairy's hand, but never have I so earnestly longed for anything so much as to meet on the mountain side, as did Tiresias the wizard, the serpents which make you change your sex; and what I most envy in the monstrous strange gods of India is their perpetual avatars and their innumerable transformations.

I began by desiring to be another man; then, reflecting that I could pretty closely foresee, by analogy, what my feelings would be, and thus be deprived of the expected surprise and change, I would have preferred to be a woman. That fancy has always recurred to me when I happened to have a mistress who was not ugly, for an ugly woman is the same as a man to me. In moments of pleasure I would willingly have changed places with my mistress, for it is very annoying not to know exactly the effect you are producing, and to judge of the pleasure others are enjoying merely by that you feel. These and many similar thoughts have caused

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me often, at most unseasonable times, to look thoughtful and meditative, and thus to be wrongly accused of coldness and infidelity.

Rosette, who, very fortunately, is ignorant of all this, thinks I am the finest lover on earth; she mistakes my powerless fury for passionate fury, and seconds as well as she can the caprices of experimentation which occur to me.

I have done all I could to convince myself that I possess her; I have tried to penetrate into her heart, but I have always stopped at the first step, at her skin or at her lips. Notwithstanding the intimacy of our physical intercourse, I feel deeply that we have nothing in common. Never once has any idea similar to my ideas unfolded its wings in that young and lovely head; never has that heart, so full of life and passion, whose beating causes that firm, white bosom to heave and fall, beaten with the beating of my heart; my soul has never been one with her soul; Cupid, the hawk-winged, has not kissed Psyche's ivory brow. No, — that woman is not my mistress.

Could you but know all I have done to compel my soul to love as loves my frame; the fury with which I have glued my lips to hers, drawn my hands through

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her hair, pressed closely her round, supple waist. Like the Salmacis of antiquity, in love with the young Hermaphrodite, I strove to confound our bodies one with the other. I drank in her breath and the warm tears which the heat of love caused to drop from the overflowing calyx of her eyes. The closer we pressed each other, the more intense our embraces, the less I loved her. My soul, sitting sadly apart, gazed with pity upon that wretched union to which she was not bidden, or veiled her brow in disgust and wept silently under her mantle. All this may be due to the fact that I do not really love Rosette, worthy of love though she be, and no matter how greatly I desire to do so.

To rid myself of the notion that I was myself, I imagined utterly strange surroundings in which it was quite improbable I should be, and, unable to cast my individuality to the winds, I endeavoured to take it into scenes so foreign that it would fail to know itself there. My success has been but indifferent; that devilish Me dogs me; I cannot away with it; I cannot even have it told, as to other bores, that I am out, or that I have gone to the country.

I have had my mistress when bathing, and played the Triton's part to the best of my ability. Our sea was a

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huge marble bath. As for the Nereid, what she exhibited made the water, transparent as it was, guilty of not being transparent enough for the exquisite beauty of what it concealed. I have possessed her at night, by moonlight, in a gondola and to the sound of music, which is uncommon here, if usual enough in Venice. I have enjoyed her in her carriage, driven at full speed, to the sound of the wheels, the bumps and the shocks, now lighted up by the lamps, now plunged in deepest darkness. There is a certain piquancy in this mode, and I advise you to try it; but I forget, — you are a regular patriarch and do not indulge in such refinements. I have gone to her through the window, having the door-key in my pocket. I have made her come to my house in broad daylight, — in a word, I have compromised her in such fashion that no one now, save myself, of course, has any doubt of her being my mistress.

Thanks to all these inventions, which, were I not so young, would seem the resources of a worn-out libertine, Rosette adores me chiefly and beyond all others. She sees in them the fire of a petulant love that cannot be restrained, and which is ever the same whatever the place or time, — the ever-renewed effect of

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her charms and the triumph of her beauty; and I would, in truth, she were right; if she is not, I must do her the justice to say it is neither her fault nor mine.

The only wrong I do her is that I am myself. Were I to say so to her, she would at once reply that that is precisely my greatest merit in her eyes, which would be more polite than sensible.

Once — it was in the beginnings of our love affair — I thought I had attained my end; for one minute I believed I loved — I did love. Oh, my friend, that minute is the only time during which I have really lived, and had it been prolonged to an hour, I should have become a god. We had ridden out together, I on my dear Ferragus, she on a snow-white mare that, with her clean limbs and well-turned neck, looks like a unicorn. We were proceeding down a great avenue of extraordinarily lofty elms; the warm golden sunshine shone down upon us through the net-work of the leafy screen; bits of ultramarine gleamed here and there in dappled clouds, great bands of pale-blue ran along the verge of the horizon and, as they met the orange tones of the sunset sky, turned into the palest and tenderest apple-green. The aspect of the heavens was strangely fair; the breeze wafted to us an indescribably sweet

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scent of wild flowers. From time to time a bird started up in front of us and flew across the avenue with a chirp. A bell in some hidden village was softly ringing out the Angelus, and its silvery tones, softened by distance, were passing sweet. Our horses walked side by side at so even a gait that neither passed the other. My heart swelled; I was becoming all soul and forgetting the body. Never had I been so happy. We were both silent, yet never had we so well understood each other. We were so close that my leg touched the flank of Rosette's mare. I bent towards her and put my arm round her waist; she did the same and let her head fall on my shoulder. Our lips met in a kiss chaste and sweet beyond all conception. Our steeds walked on with loose reins. I felt Rosette's arm relax and her back yield more and more. I too was losing strength and nearly fainting. I assure you that just then I did not trouble to know whether I was myself or some one else.

We rode in this way to the end of the avenue, when the sound of steps made us abruptly resume our former positions. It was acquaintances of ours, also on horseback, who rode up and spoke to us; I would have shot them, had I had my pistols.

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I kept looking at them with a gloomy, angry air which must have struck them as exceedingly strange. After all, I was wrong to be so angry with them, for they had unwittingly done me the favour of breaking in upon my happiness at the very moment when, thanks to its intensity, it was about to turn to pain or to sink under its own weight. The art of stopping in time is entitled to more respect than it receives. It happens that, being in bed with a woman, you put your arm round her waist. At first it is most voluptuous to feel the gentle warmth of her body, the soft, velvety back, the polished ivory of the hips, and to let the hand close upon the swelling, heaving breast. The fair one falls asleep in that posture, at once charming and sensual; the back becomes more yielding, the heaving of the bosom diminishes, the breast heaves with the longer and more even respiration of sleep, the muscles become less tense, the head rolls in her hair. Meanwhile the weight on your arm increases, and you begin to perceive that it is not a sylph but a woman whom you are supporting. Nevertheless, nothing would induce you to withdraw your arm, and that for many reasons: first, because awakening a sleeping woman is rather dangerous; one has to be in condition to substitute for the

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delightful dream she is no doubt dreaming a reality that shall be more delightful still; next, because if you ask her to raise herself sufficiently to enable you to withdraw your arm, you indirectly intimate that she is heavy and a trouble to you, which is not proper; or you give her to understand that you are weak and fatigued, a most humiliating confession on your part, which will greatly injure you in her mind; finally, as one has derived pleasure from that position, one fancies that by maintaining it more pleasure will be obtained, wherein one is mistaken. The poor arm is caught under the pressing weight, the circulation stops, the nerves are strained and numbness stings you with its innumerable stings. You become a sort of small Milo of Croton, the mattress and your fair one's back representing fairly enough the two parts of the tree that have closed. At last day comes to free you from torture and you spring from the rack with greater eagerness than a husband ever exhibits in getting off the nuptial scaffold.

Such is the history of many a passion, and that of all pleasure.

However this may be, either because of or in spite of the interruption, never had I experienced such

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sensuous delight; I really felt myself a different being. Rosette's soul had wholly entered into my body. Mine had left me, and filled her heart as hers filled mine. No doubt they had met in that long equestrian kiss (as Rosette has since called it, which, by the way, annoyed me), and had traversed each other and mingled with each other as completely as two mortal souls can do it on this perishable atom of mud. Assuredly angels must so kiss, and the true Paradise is not in heaven, but on a loved woman's lips.

In vain have I waited for the recurrence of such a moment, and I have unsuccessfully endeavoured to force a return of it. We have often ridden down the woodland avenue during fine sunsets; the trees were green as ever, the birds warbled the same songs, but to us the sun was dimmed, the foliage browned, the song of birds harsh and discordant — harmony had left us. We walked our horses and tried the same kiss. Alas! our lips merely met, and it was but the ghost of that former touch. The beautiful, sublime, divine kiss, the one and only true kiss I have ever given and received in my life, had flown forever. Since that day I have always returned from that wood with a deep, inexpressible sorrow within me. Rosette, gay and light-minded

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though she usually is, cannot escape the same feeling, and her thoughtfulness expresses itself by a delicate little pout as pretty as her smile.

Scarce anything but the fumes of wine and the brilliant light of the tapers can then draw me from my melancholy. We both drink like people condemned to death, silently, glass after glass, until we have swallowed the necessary dose. Then we take to laughing, and heartily turn into ridicule what we call our sentimentality. We laugh because we cannot weep. Ah! what shall call up a tear from my dried eyes?

How comes it that I had such pleasure on that evening? It would be hard to say. Yet I was the same man, Rosette the same woman. It was not the first time either of us had ridden out. We had seen the sun set before then, and the sight had not moved us more than a painting one admires in proportion to the splendour of the colouring. There are many avenues of elms and chestnut trees in the world, and that particular one was not the first we had traversed. What was it, then, that made us think it supremely charming, that turned the dead leaves into topazes, the green ones into emeralds, that gilded the flying atoms and changed into pearls the many drops of water scattered over the

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sward, that transformed into so sweet a harmony the squawking of birdlings and the sounds of a bell usually discordant? The air must have been full of very penetrating poetry, since even our horses seemed to feel it.

Yet nothing could be simpler or more pastoral: a a few trees, some clouds, five or six bits of marjoram, a woman, and a sunbeam flashing over it all like a golden chevron on a coat of arms. Besides, astonishment and surprise alike had nothing to do with the sensation I experienced. I was thoroughly aware of my identity. I had never come to that spot, but I perfectly recalled the shape of the leaves, and the position of the clouds, the white dove flying athwart the sky in the same direction; the little silver-toned bell, which I heard for the first time, had often sounded in my ears, and its voice was that of an old friend; without ever having traversed it, I had often ridden down that avenue with princesses mounted on unicorns; my most voluptuous dreams had wandered there at nightfall, and my desires had exchanged kisses identical with that exchanged by Rosette and me. That kiss was no new thing to me; it was such as I had thought it would be. That was perhaps the one occasion in my life on which I was

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not disappointed, and on which reality equalled ideality in beauty. If I could come across a woman, a landscape, an architecture, anything that corresponded as perfectly with my innate desire as did that moment to the moment I had dreamed of, the gods would have nothing for me to envy, and I would gladly give up my stall in Paradise. But I do not believe that a man of flesh and blood could stand for an hour such penetrating voluptuousness; two such kisses would drain away a whole life and would wholly exhaust body and soul. This would not stop me, for, being unable to indefinitely prolong my life, I care little about death, and would rather die of pleasure than of weariness or old age.

But the woman does not exist! Nay, she does exist, and perchance but a thin partition separates us. It may be that we rubbed elbows yesterday or to-day.

What does Rosette lack of being that woman? Merely belief on my part. Why, then, must I always have for mistresses women whom I love not? Her neck is polished enough to set off the most perfectly wrought necklaces; her fingers are tapered enough to do honour to the handsomest and costliest rings; a ruby would flame with pleasure at gleaming on the tip of her

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delicate ear; the girdle of Venus would fit her waist, but Love alone can tie its mother's girdle.

Whatever merit Rosette possesses is her very own; I have not added any to it. I have not cast over her beauty that veil of perfection that love wraps around the beloved. The veil of Isis is transparent by comparison with that one; satiety alone can lift the corner of it.

I do not love Rosette. At least, the love I feel for her, if I do feel any, in no wise resembles my conception of love. But it may be that my conception is a mistaken one. I dare not venture to decide. The fact remains that she renders me insensible to the merit of other women, and that I have desired no one with any persistency since I possess her. If she has to be jealous, it can be of phantasms only, for which she cares very little, although my imagination is her most formidable rival; but that is something which, clever as she is, she will probably never find out.

If women only knew! How often is the most steadfast of lovers unfaithful to the most loved of mistresses! I suppose women treat us the same way, and even worse, but like ourselves they say nothing about it. A mistress is like an unavoidable theme which

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soon disappears under embellishments and *fiorituri*. The kisses showered upon her are often not meant for her; it is the image of another woman that is kissed in her person, and she more than once profits (if profit it may be called) by the desires that another has excited. How often, poor Rosette, have you been used to incarnate my fancies and to make your rivals real; how often have you been the unwitting accomplice of my infidelities! Could you have believed, when your arms clasped me most closely, when my lips pressed yours most eagerly, that your beauty and your love had nothing to do with these things and that I was thinking of any one but you? — that those eyes, veiled in amorous languor, looked down only that they might not see you and thus destroy the illusion which you merely served to complete, and that, instead of being my mistress, you were but an instrument of lustfulness, a means whereby I deceived a desire that could not be gratified?

O divine ones, O ye fair, delicate, diaphanous virgins who from the golden backgrounds of the paintings of the old German masters look down with your violet eyes and clasp your lily hands, saints of the stained-glass windows, martyrs of the missals who smile so

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softly from amid the sweep of the arabesques, and who spring so fair and so fresh from the bosom of the flowers! — O ye beauteous courtesans lying nude in the mantle of your hair on rose-strewn couches, under great crimson curtains, with your bracelets and necklaces of large pearls, your fans and your mirrors from which the setting sun calls out, from the shadow, a dazzling flash; brown-skinned daughters of Titian, who exhibit so voluptuously your rounded hips, your firm-fleshed thighs, your polished navels, and your strong and supple backs! deities of antiquity, whose white forms show against the foliage of the garden, — you all form part of my harem; I have enjoyed each of you in turn. It was your hands I kissed, Saint Ursula, when I kissed Rosette's fair hands; never did Rosette have so much trouble in dressing her hair again as when I toyed with Muranesa's dark locks; I have been with thee, O chaste Diana, more than Acteon, and have not been changed into a stag; I took the place of thy beautiful Endymion. Numerous indeed are the rivals whom one does not mistrust, and on whom one cannot be revenged — and they are not always painted or carved either!

When you see your lover more tender than usual,

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O women, when he clasps you with extraordinary feeling, when he hides his face in your lap and then looks up at you with wandering glance; when enjoyment merely increases his desire and his kisses still your voice as though he feared to hear it, you may be sure he does not even know you are there; that he is, at that moment, with a chimera which you have made tangible and whose part you are playing. Many a chambermaid has profited by a passion that a queen had inspired; many a woman, by a love for a goddess; and vulgar reality has often served as a pedestal for the ideal idol. That is why poets' mistresses are usually slovenly trollops. You may sleep ten years with a woman without ever having seen her, and such is the story of many great geniuses whose ignoble or obscure connections have amazed the world.

This is the only way in which I have been unfaithful to Rosette; it is only for statues and paintings that I have betrayed her, and she had her full share of the betrayal. I have not the least material sin on my conscience; I am, so far as that goes, as pure as the snow on the Jungfrau, and yet, though I am not in love with any one, I would like to be so. I neither seek an opportunity nor would I regret its coming. If it did

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come, I might not turn it to account, for I am firmly convinced that things would be just the same with another woman, and I had rather things were as they are with Rosette; for, even putting aside the woman, I have at least in her a lovely companion, — very clever and most charmingly corrupt. This fact is one of the most potent factors which keep me back, for in losing the mistress I should be grieved to lose the friend.

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IV

DO you know that for some five months, yes, fully five months, five eternities, I have been the acknowledged lover of Mistress Rosette? I never thought I could be constant so long, and she did not think she could be either, I dare swear. We are really a pair of plucked pigeons, for it is only turtle-doves that are capable of such affection. How we have cooed and kissed! how we have clapsed each other! how we have lived the one for the other! Nothing could be more touching, and our two dear little hearts might have been put on top of the same time-piece, transpierced by the same spit, with a twisting flame above.

Five months alone together, as it were, for we meet every day and almost every night, and no one admitted. Is it not enough to make one shudder? Well, to the glory of the incomparable Rosette be it said, I have not been greatly bored, and I have no doubt it has been the pleasantest part of my life. I do not believe it is possible to occupy more regularly and more amusingly a passionless man, and Heaven knows how great is the

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weariness that follows upon an empty heart. You cannot have an idea of that woman's resources. She drew them first from her mind, then from her heart, for she fairly worships me. How cleverly she turns to account the least spark, and blows it into a conflagration! How skilfully she directs the least motions of my soul, turns languor to tender dreaming, and brings back, by a thousand devious ways, the mind that was wandering away from her. It is marvellous, and I admire her as one of the greatest living geniuses.

I came to her very much out of temper, angry and looking for a quarrel. I do not know how the witch set about it, but in a few minutes she had made me pay her compliments, though I did not want to do so, and kiss her hands and laugh heartily, though I was horribly wrathy. Can you imagine such tyranny? Yet, clever as she is, our *tête-à-tête* cannot be long prolonged, and during the past fortnight I have several times done what I had never done before, — opened some of the books on the table and read a few lines during the pauses in the conversation. Rosette noticed it; it aroused in her a fear she found it difficult to conceal, and she caused all the books to be carried away. I own to regretting them, though I dare not venture to ask for

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their return. The other day — dreadful symptom! — some one called while we were together, and instead of raging as I used to do at first, I experienced a sort of joy. I was almost amiable; Rosette was trying to let the talk come to an end, so that the visitor would go away, and I kept it up. When he was gone I happened to say that he was rather clever, and that his company was pleasant. Rosette reminded me that two months ago I had thought it particularly stupid and the greatest bore on earth, to which I could not reply, for it was true I had said it. Yet I was right, in spite of the apparent contradiction, for the first time he had broken in upon a delightful *tête-à-tête*, and the second time he dropped into a conversation that was exhausted and languishing (on one side at least), and saved me, for that day, the performance of a rather troublesome love-scene.

That is our position at present; it is serious, especially as one of us is still in love and clings desperately to what is left of the other's passion. I am much perplexed, for although I do not love Rosette I am very fond of her, and would not for worlds give her pain. I want to make her believe as long as possible that I love her. I mean to do this in return for the many hours to which she lent wings, in return for the love she gave

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in exchange for pleasure. I shall deceive her, but is not pleasant deceit preferable to sad truth? Never shall I have the heart to tell her I do not love her. The vain shadow of love on which she feeds seems to her so adorable, so dear; she clasps that pale spectre with such intoxication of delight that I dare not dispel the illusion; and yet I fear she will end by perceiving that it is nothing, after all, but a phantasm. We had a talk this morning which I shall reproduce in its dramatic form, for the sake of greater accuracy. It makes me fear that the ties which bind us at present will not do so much longer.

The scene is Rosette's bed. A sunbeam shines in through the curtains; it is ten o'clock. Rosette's arm is under my neck, and she does not move, for fear of waking me. At times she leans on her elbow and bends her face above mine, while holding her breath. I can see all this through my half-closed eyes, for I have not slept for an hour past. The Malines lace round the neck of Rosette's nightgown is all torn; the night has been stormy; her hair escapes at random from under her little cap. She is as pretty as it is possible for a woman to be whom one does not love and whose bed one shares.

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Rosette (seeing that I am awake). Oh, you naughty sleeper!

I (yawning). Ha-a-a!

Rosette. Don't yawn like that, or I shall not kiss you for a week.

I. Ouf!

Rosette. Apparently you do not much care whether I kiss you or not.

I. Yes, I do.

Rosette. One would not think so to hear you. All right; for the next week you may be sure I shall not kiss you once. This is Tuesday, — well, not again, before next Tuesday.

I. Bah!

Rosette. What do you mean by "bah!"?

I. I mean bah! On my life, you shall kiss me before night.

Rosette. On your life! How conceited you are. I have spoiled you, sir.

I. I shall live. I am not conceited, and you have not spoiled me; on the contrary. First, I want you to drop the "sir." I know you well enough to be called by my name.

Rosette. I have spoiled you, d'Albert!

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I. That 's right. Now your lips.

Rosette. No; not till Tuesday next.

I. Nonsense. Are we going to time our caresses with a calendar; we are too young for that sort of thing. Now your lips, princess mine, or I shall have a crick in the neck.

Rosette. No, I will not.

I. Ah! you want me to force you, my pet. Very well; forced you shall be. It is possible to do so, although it may not have been done yet.

Rosette. You are rude.

I. Pray mark, my beauty, that I honoured you with a "perhaps," which was very nice of me. But we are straying from the point. Bend down your head. Come, come; what is the matter, O favourite sultana mine? What a grumpy look we have put on! It is a smile, and not an angry pout I want to kiss.

Rosette (bending down to kiss me). I cannot smile; you say such harsh things to me.

I. I mean to say very tender things. Why should I say harsh ones to you?

Rosette. I don't know, but you do.

I. You mistake meaningless jokes for harshness.

Rosette. Meaningless! You call them meaningless?

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Nothing is meaningless in love. I had rather you beat me than laugh the way you do.

I. So you would like to see me weep?

Rosette. You always go to extremes. I do not want you to weep, but I do want you to talk sense and to drop that sarcastic tone of yours, which does not become you at all.

I. It is impossible for me to talk sense and not to be sarcastic; so I shall beat you, since that is to your taste.

Rosette. Go on.

I (gently patting her on the shoulders). I would rather cut off my own head than spoil that adorable little body of yours and mar with blue bruises the whiteness of your lovely back. However pleasant it may be for a woman to be beaten, you, my goddess, shall not be.

Rosette. You do not love me any more.

I. That does not follow very directly from what you have just said. It is about as illogical as if I said, "It is raining, I do not want my umbrella;" or, "It is cold, open the window."

Rosette. You do not love me, and you have never loved me.

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I. Ah! matters are getting complicated; "you do not love me, and you have never loved me." That is pretty contradictory, for how can I cease doing something I never began doing? You see, my queen, that you do not know what you are talking about, and that you are perfectly absurd.

Rosette. I so dearly wish to be loved by you that I have helped to deceive myself. One believes so easily in what one wishes. You, too, have deceived yourself; you mistook fancy for love, and desire for passion. That sort of thing happens every day. I am not angry with you on that account; it was not your fault that you were not in love; the fault lies with my scanty charms. I ought to have been lovelier, more playful, more coquettish; I ought to have striven to rise to your level, O my poet, instead of trying to make you come down to mine. I was afraid of losing you among the clouds, and of your head taking your heart from me. I made of my love a prison for you, and thought that when I gave myself unreservedly to you, you would keep some particle of that love.

I. Rosette, move away a little; your leg burns me; you are like a live coal.

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Rosette. If I am in your way, I shall get up. You are stony-hearted; the drops of water wear away the rock, but my tears have no effect on you. (She weeps.)

I. If you cry like that you will make a bath-tub of the bed, or rather an ocean. Can you swim, Rosette?

Rosette. You wretch!

I. Good! I am a wretch now. You flatter me, Rosette; I have not that honour; I am a peaceful citizen, alas! and have not committed the smallest crime; I may have committed a blunder — that of loving you passionately, that is all. Do you insist on my repenting of it? I have loved you — I love you as much as I can. Since I have been your lover I have clung to your footsteps; I have given you my whole time, my days and my nights. I have not used fine language to you, because I like it in print only, but I have given you many a proof of my affection. I shall say nothing of my scrupulous fidelity — that is a matter of course. Finally I have lost nearly two pounds in weight since you became my mistress. What more do you want? Here I am in your bed; I was in it yesterday, I shall be in it to-morrow. Does one do that with people one does not care for? I do every-

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thing you tell me to do. You say to me, "Go," and I go; "Stay," and I stay; I am the best lover on earth, it seems to me.

Rosette. That is exactly what I complain of — you are the most perfect lover on earth.

I. What have you to reproach me with?

Rosette. Nothing; I had rather have something to complain of.

I. That 's a queer quarrel!

Rosette. It is worse. You do not love me. I cannot help it, nor can you. What are we going to do about it? I would a good deal rather have to forgive you something. I would scold you, you would excuse yourself to the best of your ability, and we would make it up somehow.

I. All the profit would be for you. The greater the crime, the greater the reparation.

Rosette. You know very well, sir, that I am not yet reduced to that resource, and that if I only cared to, even though you do not love me and we are quarrelling . . .

I. Yes; I confess that it is wholly the result of your clemency . . . so do care to; it would be better than heaping up syllogisms as we are doing.

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Rosette. You want to break off a conversation which embarrasses you; but, my fine fellow, we shall, if you please, be satisfied with talking.

I. Not a very costly entertainment. You are wrong, I assure you, for you are as pretty as pretty can be, and I feel towards you . . .

Rosette. What you can express some other time.

I. I say, my beauty, you are a veritable Hyrcanian tigress! Your cruelty this morning is unexampled. Have you thought perchance of turning vestal? It would be a funny notion.

Rosette. Why should it be? There are funnier notions than that, but you may be sure I shall be a vestal to you. Learn, sir, that I give myself to those only who love me or who I think love me. You do not belong to either class. Please let me get up.

I. If you get up, I shall get up also. You will just give yourself the trouble of going back to bed, that 's all.

Rosette. Let me alone!

I. I 'll be hanged if I do.

Rosette (struggling). You shall let me go!

I. I venture, madam, to affirm the contrary.

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Rosette (seeing she is the weaker). Well, I 'll stop, but you hurt my arm so. What do you want of me?

I. You know very well. I shall not allow myself to say what I allow myself to do; I have too much respect for decency.

Rosette (already unable to defend herself). If you will promise to love me dearly . . . Then I give in.

I. It is rather late to give in. The enemy has already entered.

Rosette (throwing her arms around me and half fainting). Unconditionally, then . . . I trust to your generosity.

I. You are right.

Here, my dear friend, I think it is better to put a line of full stops, for the remainder of the dialogue can scarcely be expressed save by onomatopœia.

. . . . . .

Since the beginning of this scene, the sunbeam has had time to travel round the room. The suave, penetrating scent of the limes is wafted in from the garden. The weather is exquisitely beautiful; the sky as blue as an English girl's eyes. We rise, and, after breakfasting with an excellent appetite, we take a long walk through the fields. The clearness of the air, the

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beauty of the country, and the sight of that joyous nature fill me with sentimentality and tenderness enough to cause Rosette to confess that, after all, I do have some sort of a heart, just like anybody else.

Have you ever noticed the secret and irresistible influence exercised upon us, however depraved we may be and however much we may make fun of it, by the stock in trade of the eclogue and of descriptive writing, — the murmur of brooks, the song of birds, fair prospects, the scent of leaves and flowers? I confess, under the seal of the deepest secrecy, to having quite recently caught myself listening, with the most provincial emotion, to the warbling of a nightingale. It was in ——'s garden; although it was quite dark, the sky was as luminous almost as on a very fine day, so deep and so transparent that man's glance easily reached God. The disappearing folds of the angels' robes seemed to me to flutter on the white windings of the Milky Way. The moon had risen, but a great tree concealed it entirely; it filled its dark foliage with countless little luminous spots, and covered it with more spangles than ever were seen on a marchioness's fan. A silence full of soft sounds and stifled sighs was audible through the garden (this appears to be bathos, but it is not my

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fault); although I saw but the bluish beams of the moon, I seemed to be surrounded by a host of unknown yet beloved phantoms, and I did not feel alone, though there was no one but myself on the terrace. I neither thought nor dreamed; I was lost in surrounding nature; I trembled with the leaves, gleamed like the water, shone as the beams, bloomed as the flower; I was as much tree, water, or night-shade as myself. I was one and all of these, and I do not believe it is possible to separate one's self more from self than I was at that moment. Suddenly, as if something extraordinary were going to happen, the leaf on the branch was stilled, the drop of water of the fountain remained suspended in mid-air and fell not; the silver beam of the moon reached me not; my heart alone beat so loud that it seemed to fill with sound that great space. It ceased beating, and so deep a silence fell that one could have heard the grass grow and a word uttered six hundred miles away. Then the nightingale, which had probably waited for this moment to begin its song, sent forth from its tiny throat so piercing and so high a note that I heard as much through my breast as with my ears. The sound spread suddenly through the crystal heaven, void of sound, and filled it with a harmonious atmosphere,

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in which the succeeding notes flew about fluttering their wings. I understood the song as well as if I had the secret of bird speech. That nightingale sang the story of the loves I have never known, and never was story more accurate and true. Not the smallest detail, not the least gradation was omitted. It told me what I had not been able to say to myself; it explained what I had failed to understand, gave to my dreams a voice, and brought a reply from the vision hitherto mute. I knew I was beloved, and the most languorously pearly trill told me I would soon be happy. The white arms of my love seemed, in the shower of notes and the trills of the song, to stretch towards me in a moonbeam. She slowly rose before me with the perfume of the heart of a great rose. I shall attempt no description of her beauty; there are things which words cannot render. How shall one express the inexpressible; paint that which has neither form nor colour; note a toneless, wordless voice? Never was my heart so suffused with love. I would have clasped Nature herself to my breast; I pressed the void in my arms as if they were wound round a maiden's form; I kissed the air that touched my lips; I was lost in the emanations of my radiant frame. Ah! if only Rosette had been there!

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What splendid nonsense I should have talked to her! But women never know how to come at the right moment. — The nightingale ceased its song; the moon, dead sleepy, pulled on its cloud-cap, and I left the garden, for I began to feel the chill of night.

Feeling cold, I naturally thought I should be warmer in Rosette's bed than in mine, and I went off to sleep with her. I let myself in with my pass-key, for everybody in the house, even Rosette herself, was asleep, and I had the satisfaction of noting that she had dozed off over an uncut volume of verse of mine. Her two arms were rounded above her head, her lips half-opened with a smile, one leg stretched out and the other somewhat drawn up, in an attitude full of grace and ease. She looked so well that way that I was mortally sorry not to be more in love with her.

As I gazed upon her it struck me that I was as stupid as an owl. I had what I had so long desired: a mistress as much my own as my horse and my sword, young, pretty, witty, and in love; unhampered by a strict mother or a pompous father, by an acid-tempered aunt, a swashbuckler of a brother; with that wondrous delight of a husband duly sealed up and nailed down in a handsome oak coffin with a leaden one inside, the

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whole business topped by a huge dressed stone — which is not to be sneezed at; for, after all, it is no great pleasure to be caught in the very height of a voluptuous spasm and to be compelled to complete the sensation on the street after having described an arc of forty or forty-five degrees, according to the floor on which one happens to be. A mistress free as mountain air, and rich enough to indulge in the most exquisite refinement and elegance; devoid of any notion of morality, and never talking about her virtue while trying a new posture, or of her reputation any more than if she had never had one, knowing no woman intimately and despising all her sex as heartily as if she had been a man; caring very little for platonic theories and saying so, yet sentimental withal, — a woman who, in another sphere, would unquestionably have been the finest courtesan in the world and would have eclipsed the fame of Aspasia and Imperia.

Now this woman so constituted was mine. I did what I pleased with her; I had the key of her room and the key of her drawers; I opened her letters; I had taken away her name and had given her another. She was my property, a thing of mine. Her youth, her beauty, her love, all belonged to me, and I used or

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abused them as I wished. I made her go to bed during the day and sit up all night, if I so fancied; and she obeyed quickly, without seeming to make a sacrifice or putting on the look of a victim resigned to her fate. She was attentive, fond, and — amazing to relate — absolutely faithful. In other words, if, six months ago, at the time when I mourned over having no mistress, I had been promised, even far off, such bliss, I should have gone crazy with joy and shied my hat at heaven by way of manifesting my gratitude. Well, now that I do have that bliss, it leaves me cold; I scarcely feel it. I do not feel it, and the situation in which I am influences me so little that I often wonder whether it is different from my former one. I am absolutely certain that, were I to throw Rosette over, in a month, in less than a month perhaps, I should so completely and perfectly have forgotten her that I could not remember whether I had ever known her or not. Would it be the same with her? I think not.

So I was turning these things over in my mind, and, moved by a sort of feeling of remorse, I kissed the fair sleeper on the brow with the most chaste and melancholy kiss that ever young fellow bestowed on a young woman as the clock struck midnight. She moved

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slightly; the smile on her lips became brighter, but she did not wake. I slowly undressed, and, creeping under the blankets, I stretched out by her side like an adder seeking warmth. The cold touch of my limbs startled her; she opened her eyes and, without a word, pressed her lips to mine, and so wound herself around me that I was warmed up in a twinkling. The lyrism of the evening turned to prose, but to poetic prose. The night proved to be one of the finest sleepless nights I ever spent — I cannot look for others like it.

We still have pleasant hours, but they have to be brought about and prepared by some such external circumstance; while in the beginning of our affair I did not need to work myself up by looking at the moon and listening to a nightingale in order to enjoy all the pleasure which one can have without being actually in love. The threads of our love-warp are not yet broken, but here and there are knots, and the woof is not by a long way as smooth as of yore.

Rosette, who is still in love, does her best to guard against these various disadvantages. Unfortunately, there are two things in this world which cannot be controlled: love and weariness. On my part I make superhuman efforts to overcome the sleepiness which

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gains the upper hand in spite of me, and like the country bumpkins who fall asleep at ten o'clock in a town drawing-room, I keep my eyes as wide open as possible and put back the eyelids with my finger. But in vain; I get into a free and easy marital way which is most disgusting.

The dear child, having found the bucolic plan useful the other day, took me to her country seat yesterday.

I might just as well put in here a short description of that seat, which is rather fine; it will brighten up all these metaphysics, and, besides, the characters need a background, and figures do not stand out of emptiness or that brown, undetermined background with which painters fill in their canvas.

The approaches are very picturesque. You reach, along a highroad bordered by old trees, a carfax, in the centre of which rises a stone obelisk surmounted by a gilt copper ball; five roads branch out from here; then the ground suddenly sinks and the road plunges into a rather narrow valley, down which flows a streamlet, which is crossed by a single-arch bridge. The road ascends on the opposite bank, on which is situated the village, with its slate-roofed steeple showing amid the thatched roofs and the

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rounded tops of the apple-trees. The view is not very extensive, being bounded on both sides by the crest of the hill, but it is cheerful and restful. By the bridge are a mill and a tower-like building of red stone; the almost incessant baying of dogs and a few setters and bandy-legged bassets, warming themselves in the sun before the door, would suffice to indicate that it is the game-keeper's dwelling, even did the buzzards and ferrets nailed to the shutters leave you for a moment uncertain of the fact. From this point begins an avenue of mountain ash whose scarlet berries attract clouds of birds; as it is not much travelled, there is but a white strip in the centre, the remainder of the road being covered with a short fine moss, while in the double rut made by the carriage-wheels croak and leap little frogs of a chrysoprase green. Farther on one comes to a gateway, the ironwork of which was once painted or gilded, and the sides of which are adorned with artichokes and spikes. Then the road leads on to the mansion, which is still invisible, for it is sunk in greenery like a bird's nest. The road does not hurry you to the mansion, for it turns aside not infrequently to pass by a brook or a fountain, a pretty kiosk or a fair prospect, crossing or re-crossing the river by Chinese

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or rustic bridges. The unevenness of the surface, and the weirs built for the benefit of the rich make waterfalls four to five feet high here and there, and it is most delightful to hear these little falls close by, often without seeing them, owing to the impenetrable screen of willows and elders which border the river bank. The whole of this portion of the park, however, forms the antechamber, as it were, of the other, for a high-road unfortunately traverses the estate and cuts it into two parts; the inconvenience thus caused having, however, been remedied in an ingenious manner. Two great battlemented walls, filled with barbicans and loop-holes imitating a ruined fortress, rise on either side of the road, and from a tower covered with huge ivy, on the side nearest the mansion, connect with the bastion opposite by means of a regular drawbridge with iron chains, which is lowered every morning. The donjon is entered by a fine Gothic archway, and thence one penetrates the second part of the park, the trees in which, not having been cut down for more than a century, are extraordinarily high; their knotty trunks, covered with parasites, are the handsomest and the most remarkable I have ever seen. The foliage of some of them begins near the top only, and spreads out in the

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form of a canopy; that of others is like a plume; at a certain height on other trees the foliage forms a full clump near the stem, and from this point the naked trunk springs upwards like a second tree planted within the first. These trees are of such curiously varied forms that they give the impression of the foreground of a composite landscape or of the wings of a stage scene. Ivy, passing from one to the other and clinging close enough to choke them, mingles its dark, heart-shaped foliage with the green leafage and seems to form its shadow. Nothing can be more picturesque. At this point the river widens and forms a small lake, whose shallowness enables one to see, through the transparent water, the beautiful aquatic plants which cover the lakebed. They are nymphœas and lotus, that float idly in the purest crystal, that reflects both the clouds and the weeping willows that bend over the bank. The mansion is on the farther side, and a light skiff, painted apple-green and scarlet, saves one a longish détour to the bridge.

The mansion itself is a group of buildings erected at different times, with dissimilar gables and innumerable pinnacles. One building is of brick with stone facings; the main building is of the rustic order, covered

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with bosses and vermiculated work. A third portion is quite modern; it has a flat Italian roof with vases, a balustrade of tiles, and a canvas portico in the shape of a tent. The windows are all of different sizes and do not correspond with each other; they are of all shapes; even the trefoil and the pointed arch are to be met with, for the chapel is Gothic. Some parts of the buildings are trellised, after the fashion of Chinese houses, with trellises painted in different colours, on which climb honeysuckle, jessamine, nasturtiums, and Virginia creepers, the tendrils of which enter boldly into the rooms, and seem to hold out a hand as they wish you good-morning.

In spite of, or rather on account of its irregularity the aspect of the mansion is charming; it cannot all be taken in at once; the eye may choose, and something new is always turning up. This place, which I did not know, for it is some sixty miles off, took my fancy at once, and I felt greatly obliged to Rosette for having had the excellent idea of selecting such a retreat for our loves.

We reached it at dusk, and, as we were tired, we hastened, after supping heartily, to our beds, for we intended to have a good sleep.

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I was dreaming a lovely dream, full of flowers, scents, and birds, when I felt a warm breath on my brow, and a kiss alight flutteringly on my lips. A dainty smacking of lips and a soft moisture on the spot touched gave me reason to believe that I was not dreaming; I opened my eyes, and the first thing I saw was Rosette's fresh white neck as she bent over my bed to kiss me. I put my arms round her waist and returned her kiss more lovingly than I had done for a long time.

She pulled up the blind and opened the window, then came back and seated herself on the side of my couch, holding my hand in hers and playing with my rings. She was dressed with the most coquettish simplicity. She wore neither stays nor petticoats, but merely and only a long wrapper of milk-white lawn, very full and falling in many folds. Her hair was brushed up and held by a single white rose on the top of her head; her ivory feet were shod with slippers of brilliant and contrasting embroidery, and were as small as small could be, though still too large, and, without heel-backs like those of Roman women. I regretted, on seeing how attractive she looked, that I was actually her lover, instead of being just on the point of becoming so.

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The dream I was dreaming at the moment that she came to wake me in such pleasant fashion was not far removed from the reality. My room looked out on the lakelet I described a moment ago. A jessamine plant framed in the window and let fall its starry flowers like a silver shower upon my floor; great foreign flowers swung their blooms under my balcony as if offering me incense; a suave, indefinable scent, composed of many different perfumes, was wafted to my bed, from which I could see the water flash and sparkle as if covered with spangles; the birds chattered, warbled, chirped, whistled — making a sound as harmonious and confused as the buzzing of a dance. Opposite, on a hill lighted up by the sun, stretched a sward, golden-green, on which fed, herded by a small boy, a number of great oxen scattered here and there. Away up and farther back, I caught sight of large tracts of woods of a darker green, whence arose in spiral wisps the bluish smoke of the charcoal-burners' fires.

In this whole prospect everything was calm, fresh, and smiling, and wherever I cast my eyes I saw only youth and beauty. My room was hung with chintz, with matting on the floor, vases of blue Japan china,

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with round paunches and long narrow necks, full of curious flowers, tastefully arranged on stands and on the dark blue marble mantelpiece, the fireplace being itself filled with flowers. Over the doors, panels representing scenes of pastoral life in cheerful colours and delicate drawing; sofas and divans in every corner — and, finally, a beautiful young woman all in white, whose skin gave a delicate rose flush to the dress, wherever the latter touched the skin. Nothing more effective could possibly be devised for the delight of the soul and the lust of the eye.

So my idle, satisfied glance passed with equal delight from a magnificent vase adorned with many dragons and mandarins, to Rosette's slipper, and the bit of shoulder that showed under the lawn; it lighted upon the trembling stars of the jessamine and the long drooping branches of the willows on the shore, crossed the lake and wandered over the hill, then returned to the room to settle on the rose-coloured knots of some shepherdess's bodice. Through the interstices of the foliage gleamed the innumerable blue eyes of heaven; the water murmured quite softly, and I, I allowed all this joy to lap me, plunged in a tranquil, silent ecstasy, with my hand still between Rosette's hands.

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Do what you please, happiness is pink and white; you can scarcely depict it otherwise; tender tints belong to it by right. Its palette holds but water-green, heaven's blue, and straw-colour; its pictures are all painted on a light background like those of Chinese painters. With flowers, light, and perfume, with a soft, silky skin touching yours, a veiled harmony coming one knows not whence, one is perfectly happy; nor is it possible to be happy otherwise. Even I, who abhor the commonplace and dream only of strange adventures, violent passions, mad ecstasies, startling and perilous situations, even I have to be stupidly happy in that way, for do what I may, I can not find another.

Pray note that none of these thoughts occurred to me at the time; they came afterwards, while writing to you. At that particular moment I was wholly wrapped up in enjoyment, — the only occupation which becomes a sensible man.

There is no need to describe the life we lead here; you can easily guess it. We walk in the great woods, pick violets and strawberries, exchange kisses and little blue flowers, lunch on the grass, read, and forget our books under the trees; we go out on the water, and

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the end of a scarf or a white hand trails in the stream; our long-drawn songs and laughter are repeated by the echoes on the banks — our life, in short, is the most Arcadian that can be imagined.

Rosette overwhelms me with caresses and attentions; cooing more than dove in May, she twines around and enfolds me; she wants me to have no other atmosphere than her breath, no other horizon than her eyes; she blockades me most carefully, and nothing enters or goes out without her leave; she has erected a little guard-room next my heart, where she keeps watch and ward night and day. She says the most charming things to me; she writes me very loving madrigals, sits on my knee, and behaves towards me exactly as a humble slave towards her lord and master; which rather suits me, for I like little submissive ways, and I have a leaning towards oriental despotism. She does not take the least step without asking my advice, and she appears to have completely given up her own fancy and her own will; she seeks to guess and forestall my thoughts; she bores me with her tenderness, her complaisance; she is so perfect that I want to throw her out of the window. How the devil can I give up so adorable a woman without seeming to be a

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monster? It would be enough to discredit me forever in the world of love.

I do so wish I could catch her tripping, put her in the wrong. I impatiently await an opportunity to quarrel with her, but the wretch will take good care it does not arise. When I speak slowly and harshly to her, in order to bring about a row, she answers so softly, with so silvery a voice, eyes so full of tears, so sadly and so lovingly that I feel I am worse than a tiger, or at least than a crocodile, and beg her forgiveness I must, though I rage inwardly.

She is literally killing me with love, she tortures me, she gives daily an additional twist to the thumbscrews. She probably intends that I shall tell her I hate her, that she bores me to death, and that, if she does not leave me alone, I shall slash her face with my riding-whip. By Jove! she will succeed, and, the devil take me, it will not be long before she does, either, if she goes on being as charming as now.

In spite of all this fair outward seeming, Rosette is as sick of me as I am sick of her; but as she has indulged in the most marked follies on my account, she does not want to be held responsible by the worthy corporation of amorous women for the breaking-off

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of our affair. Every great passion is of course to be eternal, and it is very convenient to enjoy the benefit of this eternity without its disadvantages. Rosette reasons in this way: "This young man cares now very little indeed for me, but as he is rather artless and good-natured, he dares not show it openly, and does not know which way to turn. It is plain that I bore him, but he will die in harness rather than make up his mind to leave me. Being a bit of a poet, his head is full of fine phrases about love and passion, and he believes himself conscientiously compelled to play the part of a Tristan or an Amadis. Now, as there is nothing on earth more unbearable than the caresses of a person whom one is beginning to cease loving (and with a woman that means hating her violently), I shall lavish caresses on him until he is sick of them, and he either will have to send me to the devil, or take to loving me again as at the first, which he will be mighty careful not to do."

Nothing could be better devised. It is so satisfying to play the part of betrayed Ariadne. You are pitied and admired; there is nothing bad enough for the wretch who has been so brutal as to abandon such an adorable creature; you put on an air of resignation

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and grief, lean your chin on your hand and your elbow on your knee, so as to show off the pretty blue veins of the wrist; you avoid mentioning the ingrate's name, but you make side allusions to it, and simultaneously utter little sighs admirably modulated.

To abandon so good, so beautiful, so loving a woman, one who has made such sacrifices for you, against whom not a word can be said, a chosen vessel, a pearl of love, a spotless mirror, a drop of milk, a white rose, an ideal essence for the perfuming of life; a woman who ought to be worshipped on bended knee, and who, after her death, ought to be cut up into little pieces for use as relics, — to abandon such a woman, shamefully, fraudulently, wickedly! — why, a pirate would do no worse! To give her her death-blow, for she is sure to die of it! A man must have a heart of stone to behave in such a manner.

O men, men!

Thus do I speak to myself, but perhaps I am wrong. Although women are naturally born actresses, I can scarcely believe they are quite as much actresses as that would imply, and it may be that all Rosette's demonstrations are but the true expression of her feelings for me. But no matter what the truth may be, the continuation

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of our solitary mode of life has become impossible, and the fair lady of the castle has at last sent invitations to her acquaintances in the neighbourhood. We are busy preparing to receive these worthy country bumpkins, male and female. Farewell, my friend.

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I WAS wrong; my wicked heart, incapable of feeling love, put forth that explanation to justify its ridding itself of a burden of gratitude it refuses to bear; I had joyfully seized upon that notion by way of self-excuse; I clung to it, but it is utterly baseless. Rosette was not playing a part, and never was a woman truer than she is. Well, I am almost angry with her because of the sincerity of her love, which forms one bond the more between us, and makes it harder still and less excusable to break with her. I would rather have her false and fickle. Curious state of things, is it not? You want to leave, but you stay; you would like to say, "I hate you;" and what you do say is, "I love you." The past urges you on, and prevents your staying or turning back. You are faithful very regretfully. A nameless sense of shame prevents your giving yourself wholly to other acquaintances, and makes you compromise with yourself. You give the one all you can decently rob the other of; the chances, the opportunities of meeting, which came so easily before, are now not easy to find; you begin to recollect that you have

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important matters to attend to. Such a situation, full of trouble as it is, nevertheless is not as painful as that in which I find myself. It is easier to break away when it is a new love that calls on you to be off with the old. Hope smiles gently at you from the threshold of the home that holds your love. A fairer and more rosy-hued, white-winged illusion hovers over the scarce-closed tomb of its sister that has just died; a new flower of finer bloom and more exquisite scent, has suddenly sprung up amid the withered calyxes of the faded bouquet; fair azure prospects open out before you; avenues of discreet and dewy shrubbery are prolonged to the very horizon, — gardens with ghostly white statues or a bench against an ivy-covered wall; lawns diapered with daisies; narrow balconies on which one leans to gaze at the moon; shadows broken by faint glimmerings of light, — or drawing-rooms into which the light of day enters, but dimmed by heavy draperies; in a word, the darkness and the solitude that timid love seeks. It is like a renewal of one's youth. And, besides, there is the change of habits, the difference of scene and of people. One feels a sort of remorse, no doubt, but desire flutters and murmurs around one, as bees in springtime, and prevents its voice being heard.

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The void in the heart is filled; remembrances are effaced by new impressions.

But with me the case is wholly different. I am not in love with any one, and I wish to break with Rosette more because I am weary of and bored by myself than because I am tired of her. My old fancies, which had been partially stilled, have re-awakened more mad than before. As then, so now am I tormented by the desire to have a mistress, and now, as then, even when in Rosette's arms, I doubt whether I have ever had one. Again I see the fair lady at her window, in her Louis XIII park, and the huntress, on her white horse, gallops down the forest path. My ideal beauty smiles at me from her cloud-hammock; I seem to recognise her voice in the song of birds and the soughing of the leaves; I seem to hear on all sides voices calling to me, and to feel the daughters of the air brush my cheek with the fringe of their invisible scarfs. As in the days of my troubles of mind, I fancy that if I were to post away at once and go very fast, very far, somewhere or another, I should reach some place where things are going on that concern me, and where my fate is being settled. I feel that I am impatiently expected in some corner of this earth, — which, I do not

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know. A suffering soul calls passionately to mine and dreams of me, though it cannot come to me; hence my anxiety and my restlessness. I am violently dragged from my place. My nature is not of those to which others tend, a fixed star around which other luminaries circle; I have to wander through the spaces of heaven like an ill-regulated meteor until I meet the planet whose satellite I am to be, the Saturn to whom I am to give my ring. Oh! when will that union take place? Until it does I can look for no rest, no stay, and I shall be like the quivering magnet of a compass that is seeking the north.

I have been caught by the wing in this treacherous lime. I thought to lose a feather or two at most, and to fly away whenever it seemed good to me, but it is most difficult to do so. I am caught in an imperceptible net more difficult to break than that Vulcan forged, and the meshes are so fine I cannot escape through them. Aside from that, it is a large net and I can move about in it with apparent freedom; it is scarcely noticeable unless I try to break through it; then it resists and becomes as solid as a wall of brass.

The time I have lost, O ideal mine! without making the least effort to turn you into a reality!

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How shamefully have I yielded to that pleasure of a night, and how little do I deserve to meet you!

Sometimes I think of forming new ties, but I have no one in mind. Generally I promise myself that if I succeed in breaking away I shall never again assume such bonds, yet there is nothing to justify such a resolve; this whole affair has been apparently a very happy one, and I have no reason whatever to complain of Rosette. She has ever been kind to me and has behaved admirably well; she has been a model of faithfulness to me and has not even given cause for suspicion; the most alert and keenest jealousy would have had nothing to charge her with and would forcibly have been lulled to sleep. A jealous man could have been jealous of the past alone; it is true he would have been amply justified in that case, but that sort of jealousy is happily rare, and the present suffices without going back to dig in the ruins of former loves so that one may extract from them vials of poison and cups of bitterness. What woman would ever be loved if one thought of all that? You know in a vague way that a woman has had several lovers before you, but you say to yourself — so full of twists and turns is man's pride — that you are the first she

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has truly loved, and that an unhappy chain of circumstances alone bound her to people unworthy of her, or else that it was the vague desire of a heart seeking to satisfy itself, and which changed from one to the other because it had not yet met the right man.

It may be that one can really love a virgin only — virgin in body and soul — a frail bud as yet caressed by no zephyr and into whose closed bosom has fallen neither the raindrop nor the dewdrop, a chaste flower that exhibits its fair whiteness to you alone, a glorious silver-urned lily which has slaked no desires, on which your sun alone has shone, which has bent to your breath only, which has been watered by no hand but yours. Bitter and shameful it is to think that one is kissing away another's kisses; that there is perhaps not a single spot on that brow, those lips, that throat, those shoulders, on the whole of that body which is now yours, which has not been reddened and branded by strange lips; that the divine murmurs heard when speech fails have already sounded in other ears; that the senses so deeply stirred have not learned ecstasy and delirious delight from you, and that deep down yonder, away in one of those recesses of the soul into which one never looks, there watches an inexo-

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rable remembrance that compares the former pleasures with the present ones.

Although my natural indolence leads me to prefer highroads to untrodden paths and the public trough to the mountain springs, I must absolutely love some maiden as pure as snow, as trembling as a sensitive plant, who can only blush and look down. Perhaps within those clear depths within which no one has yet plunged shall I find a pearl of the first water, a worthy pendant to that of Cleopatra; but to do that I should have to break with Rosette, for it is not likely to be with her that I shall satisfy that desire; and indeed I do not feel that I have the strength to do so.

Then I may as well confess that I have a hidden, shameful motive which dares not manifest itself openly, but which I must nevertheless tell you of, since I have promised to conceal nothing from you; and a confession, to have any merit, must be complete. Now this motive has much to do with my uncertainty. If I break with Rosette, some time will necessarily elapse before her place is filled, easy-mannered as might be the women from among whom I would select her successor, and I have acquired with her a habit of pleasure. It is true that one may have recourse to

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courtesans. I rather liked them formerly, and did not hesitate to make use of them under analogous circumstances, but now they disgust me horribly and nauseate me. They are not to be thought of, and I am so softened by voluptuousness, the poison has so thoroughly struck in, that I cannot bear the thought of being even a month or two without a mistress. Selfishness, of course, and of the dirtiest, but I believe that if the most virtuous of men chose to be frank they would have something very similar to confess.

That is the tie which most strongly binds me, and but for this fact Rosette and I would long since have hopelessly quarrelled. Then, if the truth must be told, courting a woman is such a mortal bore that I do not feel like undertaking it. To set once more about repeating all the lovely nonsense I have already talked so often, to play again at the worshipping business, to write notes and answer others, to see fair ones home, six miles off, at night, to freeze my feet and catch cold at windows, while watching the shadow of the beloved; to calculate on a sofa how many garments separate you from your goddess; to carry bouquets and to frequent ball-rooms merely to get to the very point I have reached — why, it is not worth the pains! As

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well stick to my rut. What is the good of getting out of it to get into another exactly similar, after much work and trouble? If I were in love there would be no trouble about it at all, and the whole business would strike me as delightful, but I am not in love, much as I wish to be; for, after all, love is the one thing in this world, and if pleasure, which is but the shadow of love, attracts us so greatly, what must the reality be? In what state of ineffable ecstasy, in what region of pure delight must not find themselves those whose hearts he has pierced with one of his golden-barbed arrows, and who burn with the sweet flame of mutual love!

By Rosette's side I experience the flat calm and the sort of lazy comfort which is derived from the gratification of our senses, but nothing more. And that is not enough. That voluptuous numbness not infrequently turns into a torpor, and the calm into weariness; then I fall into objectless distraction and strangely savourless reveries which fatigue and wear me out. I must somehow or another get out of this state of things.

I should certainly be much happier than I am, I should bore others less and be less bored myself, if it were possible for me to be like some of my friends

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who passionately kiss an old glove, who are delighted with a pressure of the hand, who would not exchange for a sultana's jewels a few wretched flowers half withered by the heat of the ball-room, who weep over and sew in their shirt, over the heart, a note so poorly written and so stupid that it might well have been copied from the "Complete Letter Writer," who adore women with large feet and give as an excuse that they are high-souled; or if I could follow, trembling with emotion, a disappearing dress, wait for a door to open and let pass in a flood of light a beloved fair form; if a word breathed low made me change colour; if I had the strength of mind to give up dinner in order to be sooner at the trysting-place; if I were capable of stabbing a rival or fighting a duel with a husband; if by a special favour of heaven, I could think ugly women clever, and ugly and stupid ones kind-hearted; if I could make up my mind to dance the minuet or listen to the sonatas played by young ladies on the harp or the piano; if my powers were equal to *hombre* and *reversis*, — in a word, if I were a man, and not a poet.

Of women I have never asked but one thing — beauty; I can easily dispense with cleverness and soul-

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fulness in their case. A beautiful woman is always a clever woman to me; she is clever enough to be beautiful, and I know of no cleverness that matches that one. It takes many and many a brilliant remark and much sparkling wit to equal the flash of a beautiful glance. I prefer a pretty mouth to a witticism, handsome shoulders to any one virtue, even a divine one; I would exchange fifty souls for a pretty foot, and all poetry and all poets for the hand of Joan of Aragon or the forehead of the Madonna di Foligno. Above all things I adore beauty of form; to me beauty is the Deity become visible, it is tangible happiness, it is heaven on earth. I am carried away beyond the power of words by the curve of certain lines, the delicacy of a lip, the shape of an eyelid, a bending of the head or the long oval of a face, and I remain under the spell for hours.

Beauty, the only thing that cannot be acquired, never to be had by those who have it not at first, fragile and fleeting flower that grows without having been sown, sheer gift of heaven, Beauty, the most dazzling diadem with which chance can crown a brow, thou art wondrous and precious, like everything beyond man's reach, like the azure of the firmament, the gold

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of the star, the perfume of seraph's lilies. A footstool may be exchanged for a throne, the world itself may be conquered — many have done it, but who can help kneeling before thee, pure incarnation of the Divine thought?

I ask for beauty alone, it is true, but I must have it in such perfection that I shall probably never come across it. I have undoubtedly seen here and there, in a few women, admirable parts in a mediocre whole, and I have loved them for what there was of choice in them, eliminating the remainder; but it is rather painful and grievous work to thus suppress one half of one's mistress, and to mentally cut off whatever in her is ugly or common by keeping one's eyes fixed on what she happens to have beautiful. Beauty is harmony, and a uniformly ugly person is often less unpleasant to look at than a woman of unequal beauty. Nothing worries me so much as an unfinished masterpiece or an imperfect beauty — a spot of oil shocks us less on coarse cloth than on a rich stuff.

Rosette is not bad; she may pass for beautiful, but she is far from realising what I dream; she is a statue several parts of which are finished; the others have not been sufficiently freed from the matrix; some parts

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are brought out with much delicacy and charm, others in a coarser and less careful way. To vulgar eyes the statue appears to be thoroughly finished and complete in beauty, but a more attentive observer soon discovers places where the workmanship is not clean enough, and contours which, if they are to attain their proper perfection, require that the workman's nail be passed and repassed upon them many a time — love has to polish this statue and finish it, which is equivalent to saying that I shall not be the one to do the task.

Mark, I do not circumscribe beauty within certain curves of lines merely. The port, the gesture, the gait, breath, colour, sound, perfume, all that is life enters, in my opinion, into the composition of beauty; all that is scented, all that sings, all that beams, is beauty's by right. I love rich brocades, costly stuffs with full and heavy folds; great flowers and scent-boxes; the limpidity of running waters and the gleam and shimmer of handsome weapons; blood horses and great white dogs like those seen in the paintings of Paolo Veronese. In this respect I am a regular pagan and I do not worship misshapen gods, although at bottom I am not exactly irreligious, as it is called; but in point of fact there is not a worse Christian than

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I. I cannot understand the mortification of the flesh which is the very essence of Christianity; to me, striking at God's work is sacrilege, and I cannot believe that flesh is evil since He created it with His own hands and in His own image. I do not much like those long close gowns of dark stuff from which emerges nothing but a head and a couple of hands, and the paintings in which all is lost in shadow save a brow that shines out. I want sunshine everywhere, as much light and as little shadow as possible, bright colours, undulating lines, a proud nudity well displayed, and the flesh not concealing the fact of its existence, since, just as much as the soul, it is an eternal hymn of praise to God.

I can quite understand the mad enthusiasm of the Greeks for beauty, and I do not myself see anything absurd in the law which compelled judges to hear the pleadings of advocates in a dark place only, lest their good looks and their graceful gestures and attitudes should sway the court.

I would not buy anything from an ugly saleswoman, and I give alms more willingly to beggars whose rags and emaciation are picturesque. There is a little fever-stricken Italian, green as a lime, with big black-and-

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white eyes that seem to fill his face, and looking as if he were an unframed Murillo or Spagnoletto which a dealer has stuck up against a post — he always gets a couple of sous more than the others. Never would I strike a handsome horse or dog, and I would not have a friend or a servant of an unprepossessing appearance. Ugly things and ugly people are a torture to me. Architecture in bad taste, badly designed furniture, prevent my enjoying myself in a house, comfortable and attractive though it may be in other respects. The best of wine seems to me almost inferior in a misshapen glass, and I own I should prefer the most Spartan of broths served in Palissy enamel to the finest game on common earthenware. Externals have always had great influence upon me; hence I avoid the company of old men. Their wrinkles and deformities sadden and affect me unpleasantly, — though some of them have a beauty of their own, — and my pity for them is largely made up of disgust. Of all ruins in this world, the saddest to behold is assuredly the ruin of man.

Were I a painter (and I have always regretted that I am not), none but goddesses, nymphs, madonnas, cherubs, and cupids should have place on my canvas.

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It seems to me that it is a crime of lèse-painting to devote one's self to painting portraits, save those of beautiful women; and far from desiring to multiply ugly or vile faces, insignificant or vulgar heads, I would rather have the originals lose them. I could praise Caligula's ferocity, had he exercised it in this way.

The only thing on earth I have ever wished for somewhat continuously is to be handsome. By that I mean handsome as Paris or Apollo. Manly beauty does not mean simply that a man is not deformed, has nearly regular features, — nose in the middle of the face, neither flat nor hooked, eyes neither red nor bleary, a mouth of proper size. If that were manly beauty, then I possess it, but I consider myself as far removed from my ideal of virile beauty as if I were one of those figures which strike the hour on church clocks; if I had hummocks for shoulders, bandy legs like a basset's, a nose and mouth like a monkey's, I should approach as nearly to it as I do now. Many a time have I looked at myself for hours at a stretch, in a mirror, with unimaginable fixedness and attention, to see whether my face had improved at all. I expect the lines to shift or to straighten or to curve more delicately and accurately, mine eyes to light up and to

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be more brilliantly humid, the deep depression between my brow and my nose to fill up, my profile to thus assume the simplicity and repose of the Greek profile; and I am always greatly surprised that nothing of all this happens. I go on hoping that some spring or another I shall shed this old outward man of mine as a serpent sheds its old skin. To think that I shall never be handsome, though it would take so little to make me so! Why, the half, the hundredth, the thousandth part of a line more or less here or there, less flesh on this bone, more on that — a painter or a sculptor would have managed it in half an hour. What could it matter to the atoms of which I am composed whether they crystallised in one fashion or another? What mattered it to this contour to swell out here or to sink in there? What necessity was there that I should be thus, and not otherwise? Upon my word, if I had my hand on Chance's throat I think I should strangle her. Because a wretched atom of something or other took a fancy to falling I know not where, and to stupidly turn into the awkward figure that I am, I am doomed to eternal misery. Is not that the most amazingly stupid and wicked thing on earth? Why is it that my soul, intensely though it longs to do so, cannot drop the

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pitiful cadaver it keeps going, and vivify instead one of those statues whose exquisite beauty attracts and delights it? Did I but know the formula of the transmigration of souls, there are two or three persons whom it would give me infinite pleasure to murder. I have always felt that, in order to do what I want to do (though I do not know what it is), I need very remarkable and perfect beauty, and I fancy that, did I possess it, my life, now such a mass of complications and annoyances, would have flowed on smoothly and peacefully.

There are so many beautiful faces in paintings — why is not one of them mine? There are so many lovely heads disappearing under the dust and grime of time in old galleries — would it not be better for them to leave their frames and show radiantly upon my shoulders? Would Raphael's reputation greatly suffer if one of the angels whom he has set swarming in the ether of his paintings, were to lend me his face for thirty years? There are so many of the finest parts of his frescoes which have scaled off and fallen through age. No one would miss what I got. What are all those silent beauties, on whom the common herd of men scarcely casts a passing glance, doing on those

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walls? And why is God, or Chance, not clever enough to do what a man manages to do with a few hairs at the end of a stick and a few bits of different-coloured paste thinned out on a piece of board?

The first feeling I experience in presence of one of those wondrous heads whose glance, the painter's work, seems to plunge through you into the infinite, is emotion and an admiration not wholly free from terror. The tears rise to my eyes, my heart beats loud. Then, when I have familiarized myself somewhat with the face, and have penetrated more deeply the secret of its beauty, I silently compare it with myself; jealousy writhes within my soul more actively than viper writhes, and I have the greatest difficulty in refraining from springing at the painting and tearing it to pieces.

To be beautiful, handsome, means that you possess a power which makes all smile upon and welcome you; that everybody is impressed in your favour and inclined to be of your opinion; that you have only to pass through a street or to show yourself at a balcony to make friends and to win mistresses from among those who look upon you. What a splendid, what a magnificent gift is that which spares you the need to be

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amiable in order to be loved, which relieves you of the need of being clever and ready to serve, which you must be if ugly, and enables you to dispense with the innumerable moral qualities which you must possess in order to make up for the lack of personal beauty.

What more could a man desire who should unite the highest beauty to the greatest physical strength, who with the limbs and features of Antinoüs enjoyed the vigour of Hercules? I am sure that with these two gifts and the soul I possess I should be ruler of the world in less than three months.

There is one other gift I have yearned for almost as much as for beauty and strength, — the power of passing from one place to another with the speed of thought. Were I fair as the angels, strong as a tiger, swift as an eagle, I would think the world not as badly put together as I do at present. Beauty of face to seduce and fascinate my prey, wings with which to swoop down upon it, and talons with which to rend it — as long as I lack these, I shall be unhappy.

My every passion, my every taste has been but a disguise assumed by these three desires. I have loved arms, horses, and women: arms, to make up for the

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vigour I lack; horses, to bear me along as on wings; women, to possess in some one at least the beauty which I have not. I sought by preference the most ingeniously murderous weapons, those making incurable wounds. I have never had occasion to use a creese or a yataghan; nevertheless, I like to have them about me; I draw them from the sheath with an indescribable feeling of strength and security; I practise very energetically with them, and if I happen, at such a time, to catch the reflection of my face in a mirror, I am amazed at its ferocious expression. As for horses, I ride them so hard that if they do not founder under me, I want to know the reason why. If I had not given up riding Ferragus, he would be dead long ago, which would be a pity, for he is a fine horse. What Arab steed can speed as fast as my desires? In women, I have cared for the outward form only, and as, up till now, those I have seen are far from coming up to my ideal of beauty, I have gone back to statues and pictures — a pretty poor resource, after all, when one is as hot-blooded as I am. There is, however, something noble and fine in loving a statue; such love is quite disinterested, and fears neither the satiety nor the disgust of victory, since the repetition of the story of Pygmalion is

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not in reason to be expected. The impossible has always charmed me.

Is it not strange that I, who am still in the bloom of my youth, who, far from having gone to excess in anything, have not made use of the simplest things even, should have reached a state of such weary disillusionment that I cannot be stirred save by what is extraordinary or difficult? That satiety should follow pleasure is a natural and intelligible law. Nothing is easier to understand than that a man who has eaten abundantly of every dish at a feast should not be hungry, and should endeavour to excite his fatigued appetite with hot condiments or heating wines; but that a man who has barely sat down to table, and who has scarcely touched the first course or two, should at once experience that disdainful disgust, be unable to touch, without feeling nauseated, any dishes not highly spiced, and should care only for meat that is very gamey, for very ripe cheese, and particularly dry wines, — that is a phenomenon due to a peculiar constitution; it is as if a six-months-old baby were to refuse its nurse's milk and to insist on being given brandy only. I am as weary as if I had performed all the marvellous deeds of Sardanapalus, and yet my life has been outwardly chaste and quiet. It is

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a mistake to suppose that possession is the only road that leads to satiety; a desire such as mine is far more exhausting. Its glance embraces and penetrates the object it yearns for and that shines above him, more swiftly and more thoroughly than if it touched it, for what could the use of it teach him further, and what experiment can come up to that constant, passionate contemplation?

I have gone through so many things, though it is but few that I have seen all round, that the steepest peaks alone tempt me now. I suffer from the malady which attacks strong nations and strong men as they grow old — the impossible. Nothing I can do interests me. I suffer as you suffered, Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, great Romans of the Empire, so misunderstood and pursued by the yelping pack of rhetoricians, and I pity you with all the power of pity left me. I too would like to bridge the sea and pave the waves; I have thought of burning cities to light up my feasts; I have wished to be a woman in order to know new forms of voluptuousness. Thy gilded house, O Nero, is but a filthy stable in comparison with the palace I have built for myself. My wardrobe is fuller than thine, Heliogabalus, and infinitely finer. My circuses are

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fuller of roars and blood than yours, my perfumes more penetrating and stronger, my slaves more numerous and handsomer. I too have harnessed naked courtesans to my car and trodden on men as haughtily as you. How many Babels have I not heaped one upon another to reach the heavens, insult the stars, and spit upon the earth from on high! Why am I not God — since man I cannot be?

I believe it will take a hundred thousand centuries of nothingness to rest me after the fatigue of my twenty years of life. God of heaven, what stone shall you roll upon me? into what darkness shall you plunge me? of what Lethe shall you make me drink? under what mountain shall you bury the Titan? Is it to be my fate to vomit flames out of my mouth, and to cause earthquakes by rolling over on one side?

When I remember what a gentle, meek woman was my mother, with simple tastes and ways, I am quite surprised I did not kill her when she bore me. How comes it that not one of her pure, calm thoughts was transferred into my being with the life she gave me, and why am I the child of her flesh only, and not of her mind also? The dove has brought forth a tiger that wants the whole world for a prey.

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I have lived in the quietest and chastest surroundings. It is difficult to conceive of a life in a purer setting than mine, spent, as it has been, by my mother's chair in the company of my sisters and the house dog. I have seen round me but the kindly and calm faces of the old servants grown grey in our service, and who had become hereditary retainers, as it were; serious and sententious relatives and friends, dressed in black, who laid down their gloves, the one after the other, on the brim of their hat; a few middle-aged aunts, plump, clean, discreet, with linen dazzlingly white, grey skirts, thread mittens, and their hands clasped nun-fashion before them; furniture so sober as to be gloomy, wainscoting of bare oak, leather hangings, an interior sober and subdued, such as some Flemish painters have represented at times. The garden was damp and shady; the box that outlined the beds, the ivy that clothed the walls, and a few bare-limbed firs were expected to represent its greenery, and failed almost completely; the house, built of brick, with a high pitched roof, was, though spacious and in good condition, rather gloomy and sleepy. Certainly nothing could be more conducive to a quiet, austere, melancholy life than such a dwelling. It

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would seem as if children brought up in it could not fail to become priests or nuns. Well, in that atmosphere of purity and peace, in that shadow and quiet, I was rotting little by little, without its showing outwardly, like an apple on straw. In the very bosom of that honest, pious, holy family I had reached a condition of horrible depravation. It was not through contact with the world, for I had not seen it, nor through over-excited passions, for I was chilled to the marrow by the good old damp walls. The worm had not come to my heart out of another fruit. It had been born of itself in the very midst of my being, which it had gnawed and traversed in every direction. Outwardly, nothing was apparent to warn me that I was becoming corrupt. I had neither stain nor mark of sting, but I was hollow within, a thin pellicle, brilliantly coloured, but which the least shock would burst. Is it not amazing that a child born of virtuous parents, brought up carefully and discreetly, kept from every evil thing, should corrupt himself to such a degree and should reach the point I have reached? I am sure that if one were to go back to the sixth generation of my ancestors not a single atom like those of which I am formed would be found. I do not belong to my family; I am

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not a limb of that noble trunk, but a poisonous mushroom that grew between its moss-covered roots during a close, stormy night; and yet no one has more than myself yearned and longed for the beautiful, no one has more striven to rise, though every attempt but made me fall lower, and my salvation became my destruction.

Although I prefer solitude to society, it is worse for me than the latter. Whatever takes me out of myself is healthful to me; society bores me, but forcibly takes me from the empty reverie in which I move up and down with folded arms and bent brows. So, since our *tête-à-tête* has been broken up and there are guests here with whom I am forced to constrain myself somewhat, I am less subject to fits of depression, and less tormented by those exaggerated desires which swoop down on me like a flock of vultures as soon as I am unoccupied for a moment. There are a few rather pretty women and one or two rather pleasant and very jolly fellows; but of all that swarm of bumpkins, the one who most charms me is a young gentleman who arrived two or three days ago. I took a fancy to him at once, and merely to watch him dismount made me fond of him. No one could be more graceful. He is not very tall, but well

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turned and of a handsome figure; he has an indescribably delightful soft undulation in his walk and gestures, and many a woman would be glad to own as small a hand and foot as his. His only defect is that he is too handsome and too delicate-featured for a man. He has a pair of the handsomest dark eyes in the world, with an indefinable expression in them and a look that it is difficult to meet, but as he is quite young and has not a trace of hair on his face, the roundness and perfection of the lower part of his face temper somewhat the brilliancy of his eagle glance. His long, brown, glossy hair falls in great curls upon his neck and gives a very peculiar character to his face.

At last I have seen in the flesh and walking before me one of the types of beauty I have dreamed of! What a pity that he is a man, or else that I am not a woman! This Adonis, who joins to his handsome face a very bright and comprehensive wit, has the further advantage of speaking his clever sayings and his pleasantries in a voice so silvery and striking in tone that one can scarce listen to him without emotion. He is really perfection. He appears to share my taste for fine things, for his clothes are very rich and in the best taste, his horse a spirited

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thorough-bred, and, in order that the whole thing should be well and suitably rounded off, he had, riding behind him on a cob, a page of fourteen to fifteen, fair, rosy, and as pretty as a cherub, half-asleep and so tired out by the ride that his master had to lift him off his saddle and to carry him in his arms to his room. Rosette received him warmly, and I fancy intends making use of him to awaken jealousy in me and thus cause to flame out whatever fire may yet be burning under the ashes of my dead passion. Yet, formidable as such a rival is, I am little disposed to be jealous of him, and I feel so drawn toward him that I would gladly enough give up my love to gain his friendship.

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VI

AT this point we shall, with the gentle reader's permission, leave to his reveries the worthy personage who has, up to this time, monopolized the stage and spoken for himself, and return to the ordinary form of the novel — without prejudice to our resumption of the dramatic form, if need be; reserving also the right of dipping again in that manner of epistolary confession which the aforesaid young gentleman addressed to his friend, convinced as we are that, notwithstanding our penetration and sagacity, we know less on the subject than he does.

The little page was so completely tired out that he slept in his master's arms, and his little head, with its disordered hair, rolled to and fro as though he were dead. It was quite a distance from the outer stairs to the room assigned to the new arrival, and the servant who showed him the way offered to carry the lad in his turn, but the young gentleman, for whom the burden seemed to be light as a feather, thanked him and refused. He placed the

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lad very gently on the sofa and took the greatest care not to wake him; no mother could have done better. When the servant had withdrawn and the door was shut, he knelt before him and tried to pull off his boots; but the operation was rendered difficult by the little feet being swollen and painful, and the pretty sleeper uttered from time to time inarticulate half-sighs, like one about to awake; when this occurred the young gentleman stopped and waited till the lad was asleep again. At last the boots came off and the worst was done, for the stockings were taken off readily. Having completed this, the master took the lad's two feet and placed them on the velvet of the sofa; these feet were the shapeliest that could be seen and quite, quite tiny, white as new ivory, and somewhat flushed, thanks to the pressure of the boots for some seventeen hours. They were too small for a woman's feet and seemed never to have been walked on. What little was seen of the ankle was round, plump, polished, translucent, and marked by the blue veins, — an exquisitely fair ankle worthy of the foot.

The young gentleman, still kneeling, looked most lovingly and admiringly upon those two little feet. He

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bent down, took hold of the left one and kissed it; then of the right one and kissed it also; thereafter with successive kisses he proceeded up the leg to near the knee. The page half opened his long eyelashes, and with a glance at his master at once loving and sleepy, but which did not denote surprise, "My belt hurts me," he said, passing a finger under the ribbon and going to sleep again. His master undid the belt, put a pillow under the lad's head, and finding that his feet, a moment since so hot, were now somewhat cold, he wrapped them carefully in his cloak, drew up an arm-chair and sat down close by the sofa. Two hours thus went by; the young gentleman watching the sleeping page and the shadows of dreams upon his brow. No sound was heard in the room save the lad's regular breathing and the ticking of the clock.

Unquestionably the picture the pair made was lovely. A good painter would have turned to account the possibilities of effect in the contrast of the two kinds of beauty. The master was beautiful with a woman's beauty; the page with a girl's loveliness. His round, rosy face, framed in by his hair, looked like a peach surrounded by leaves; spite of the fa-

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tigue of travel having robbed it of some of its brilliancy, it had all the freshness and bloom of the fruit. The parted lips revealed small, milk-white teeth, and a network of blue veins marked the full and shining temples; the eyelashes, like to the golden rays that adorn in missals the heads of virgins, came nearly half-way down his cheeks; his long silky hair was at once golden and silvery — golden in the shadow, silvery in the light. The neck was both slender and plump, and did not appear to belong to the sex the clothing indicated; two or three buttons of the tunic, unbuttoned to allow of freer breathing, enabled one to catch sight, through a partly opened shirt of fine Holland linen, of the plump and wonderfully white bosom and the beginning of a certain round outline difficult to understand in a youth's chest. Close observation might have led one to think the hips rather full. The reader may draw his own conclusions; we merely suggest, for we are no wiser than he on this point, though we do hope to learn more soon and promise to keep him informed of our discoveries. Let the reader, if less short-sighted than we are, glance under the lace of that shirt and decide for himself whether that contour swells too much or not;

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but we must warn him that the curtains are drawn and that the room is filled with a semi-obscurity not very favourable to this sort of investigation.

The gentleman himself was pale, but of a virile, vigorous, golden pallor; the pupils of his eyes moved in a humid azure; his thin, straight nose gave to his profile striking pride and strength, and the flesh was so thin as to be translucent at the edges; his mouth, which smiled most sweetly at times, was usually curved at the corners, but in rather than out, as on some of the heads in the pictures of the old Italian masters. This gave him an adorably disdainful look, a most piquant *smorfia*, an air of childish pouting and temper at once most striking and most enchanting.

What was the nature of the bonds uniting master and page? There certainly existed between them a greater affection than that which may exist between master and domestic. Were they friends or brothers? In that case why the disguise? Yet it would have been difficult for any one who had witnessed the scene just described to believe that the pair were really what they appeared to be.

"The dear one, sound asleep!" whispered the young man to himself. "I do believe he never

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travelled so far in his life, sixty miles on horseback, and so frail! I am afraid the fatigue will make him ill — but surely not; it will all be gone by morning. His lovely colour will have come back and he will look fresher than a rose after a rain. But is he not a beauty! If I were not afraid of waking him, I would whelm him with caresses. What a lovely dimple in his chin, and what a delicate, white skin. Sleep sound, dear treasure. I am positively jealous of your mother and I wish you were my child. You are not ill, are you? No, his breathing is regular, and he does not move. But is not that a knock — ?"

Some one had, indeed, knocked twice, as softly as possible, on the door panel.

The young gentleman rose, but, lest he should have been mistaken, waited, before opening the door, until the call was repeated. Two other knocks, somewhat sharper, were heard and a woman's soft voice whispered very gently, "It is I, Theodore."

Theodore opened the door, but less eagerly than a young man is wont to open to a soft-voiced woman who comes mysteriously knocking at the close of day. The half-opened leaf gave entrance to — guess whom — to the mistress of perplexed d'Al-

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bert, to Princess Rosette herself, rosier than her name and with bosoms as swelled as ever woman's who entered at eve a handsome man's room.

"Theodore," said Rosette.

Theodore put his finger to his lips like a statue of silence, and pointing to the sleeping lad, made Rosette pass into the next room.

"Theodore," said Rosette, who seemed to take peculiarly sweet delight in uttering the name, and to seek at the same time to collect her ideas, "Theodore," she continued, still holding the hand the young man had offered her to lead her to the armchair, "so you have come back at last? What have you been doing all this time? Where have you been? Do you know that it is six months since I have seen you? That is not right, Theodore. You owe to people who love you, even if you do not love them, some attention and a little pity."

Theodore. What have I been doing? I do not know. I have come and gone, slept and waked, sung and wept, been hungry and thirsty, too cold and too hot; I have been bored, I have less money, and six months more to my age — I have lived; that 's all. And what have you been doing?

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Rosette. I have loved you.

Theodore. Nothing else?

Rosette. Nothing else. That was a waste of time, was it not?

Theodore. You might have used it to better purpose, my poor Rosette. For instance, you might have loved some one who could return your love.

Rosette. In love as in all else I am disinterested: I am not a usurer in love; I give outright.

Theodore. That is a very rare virtue, that can spring up but in a choice soul. I have very often wished I could love you, at least in the way you would have me do; but there is between us an insurmountable obstacle, which I may not tell you of. Have you had another lover since I left you?

Rosette. I have had one, and have him still.

Theodore. What kind of a man is he?

Rosette. A poet.

Theodore. A poet? the devil! And what has he done?

Rosette. I do not really know; some sort of a book that nobody knows about and that I tried to read one evening.

Theodore. So you have an unpublished poet for

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lover. Curious! Is he out at elbows? Is his linen dirty? Do his stockings fall round his legs?

Rosette. No; he dresses rather well, washes his hands, and has no ink-stains on his nose. He is a friend of de C——'s; I met him at Mme. de Thémines, — that tall woman, you know, who plays at being a little innocent child.

Theodore. And may I know the name of this fine gentleman?

Rosette. Certainly; he is the Chevalier d'Albert.

Theodore. Chevalier d'Albert! Was he not the young man who was on the balcony when I got off my horse?

Rosette. The very one.

Theodore. And who looked so attentively at me?

Rosette. Exactly.

Theodore. He is a good-looking fellow. And so you have not forgotten me for him?

Rosette. No. Unfortunately you are not of those whom one forgets.

Theodore. And no doubt he is very deeply in love with you.

Rosette. I am not so sure of that. There are times when he seems to be very much in love with me, but

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in reality he does not care for me, and he is not far from hating me, for he is angry with me because he cannot love me. He did just as others, more experienced than he, have done — mistook a lively desire for passion, and was quite surprised and much disappointed when his desire was satisfied. It is a mistake to suppose that two people who have been together must necessarily adore each other.

Theodore. And what do you intend to do with this no-lover lover?

Rosette. What one does with old moons and old fashions. He has not strength enough to be the first to break away, and although he does not love me in the real meaning of the word, he clings to me through a habit of pleasure, and that is the most difficult kind to shake off. If I do not come to his rescue, he is capable of remaining conscientiously bored by my side until the Last Judgment, and even longer, for he has in him the germ of all noble qualities, and the flowers of his soul are but too eager to bloom in the sunshine of eternal love. I am really sorry I could not be that sunshine to him. Of all my lovers whom I have not loved, he is the one I care for most, and if I were not so kind-hearted I would not let him go free, but keep him.

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This I shall not do, however, and at present I am busy wearing him out.

Theodore. How long will that take?

Rosette. A fortnight or three weeks, but certainly less long than if you had not come. I know I shall never be your mistress, for a reason to which, you tell me, I would yield if you were allowed to reveal it. Yet, though I am forbidden all hope as far as you are concerned, I cannot bring myself to be another man's mistress when you are by; it seems to me a profanation and to deprive me of the right of loving you.

Theodore. Keep this lover for love of me.

Rosette. I will, if it pleases you. But if you could have been mine, how different would my life have been. The world entirely misunderstands me, and I might have died without any one suspecting my real self, except you, Theodore, the only one who has understood me and who has been cruel to me. I have never wished to have a lover but you, and I have not had you. If you had loved me, Theodore, I should have been a chaste and virtuous woman, worthy of you; instead of which, I shall leave (supposing any one remembers me) the reputation of a light o' love, of a sort of courtesan who differed from the street-walker only in regard

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of wealth and rank. I was born with the highest aspirations, but not to be loved depraves me more than anything else. Many who despise me have no idea of what I have suffered before becoming what I am. As I knew for a certainty that I could never belong to him whom I preferred to all others, I let myself go, and did not guard a body which could not be possessed by you. As for my heart, no one has it or ever shall have it. It is yours, though you have broken it, and, unlike most women, who think themselves honest because they have not passed from one bed to another, I have, while prostituting my body, always remained faithful to you in heart and soul. I have at least made some men happy; I have caused fair illusions to flutter around some couches. I have unwittingly deceived more than one noble heart. I was so wretched at being rejected by you that I have always dreaded subjecting any one to such torture. That is the real reason of many an affair of mine attributed to sheer wantonness. I a wanton! oh, Heavens! If you only knew, Theodore, the deep grief of feeling that one's life is a failure, that one has passed by happiness, that every one misunderstands you and that it is impossible to make people change their opinion of you, that your

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highest qualities are turned into faults, your purest perfumes into poisons, that nothing is known of you but what is evil, to have always found the door opened to your vices and closed to your virtues, to have never been able to cause a single lily or rose to bloom amid the hemlock and the nightshade. These are things you do not know, Theodore.

Theodore. Alas! Rosette, what you tell me is but every one's story. The better part of ourselves is that which remains within us and which we cannot bring forth. Poets are so made. Their finest poem is the one they have never written; they take more poems away with them in their coffins than they leave in their library.

Rosette. I shall take my poem away with me.

Theodore. And I, mine; which of us has not composed one in his life? What man too happy or too wretched not to have written one in his head or his heart? Public executioners have perhaps composed poems wet with the tears of the most exquisite feeling; poets may have composed some fit for executioners, so bloody and monstrous are they.

Rosette. Yes, — they might scatter white roses on my grave, for though I have had ten lovers I am a

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virgin and shall die a virgin. Many of the so-called virgins, on whose graves are constantly strewn jessamine and orange blossoms, have been downright Messalinas.

Theodore. I know your worth, Rosette.

Rosette. You alone have seen my real self, for you have seen me filled with a very true and a very deep because hopeless love. And he who has not seen a woman in love cannot tell what she is; this is my consolation in bitterness.

Theodore. And what thinks of you that young man who, in the eyes of the world, is now your lover?

Rosette. A lover's thoughts are deeper than the sea, and it is hard to tell what lies in a man's heart. Though the sounding line were a hundred thousand fathoms long it would not reach the bottom. Yet I have succeeded occasionally with this man, and the lead brought up sometimes mud, sometimes lovely shells, but usually mud mixed with broken corals. As to what he thinks of me, that has varied a good deal. He began by despising me, which is the way others end; young men with lively imaginations are subject to that. Their first step is always a big drop, and they cannot pass from fancy to reality without a shock. He de-

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spised me and I entertained him; now he has esteem for me, but I bore him. During the first period of our love affair he saw but the commonplace in me, and I think the certainty he felt that I would not resist him greatly influenced his resolve. He seemed very anxious to have an intrigue, and I thought at first it was merely a case of a full heart that must needs overflow, or a purposeless springtime love that makes a man embrace trees and kiss the flowers and the turf for lack of a woman. But it was not that. He merely made use of me to reach something else; I was a means, not an end, to him. Under the outward freshness of his twenty years and the first bloom of his youth, he concealed deep corruption. He had been stung to the heart; he was a Dead Sea fruit. A soul as old as Saturn, as incurably unhappy as ever was, inhabited his young and vigorous frame. I confess to having been frightened, Theodore, and to having almost felt my head swim as I bent over the black depths of that life. Your sorrows and mine are naught in comparison with his. Had I loved him better it would have killed him. Something that is neither of the world nor in the world calls and attracts him irresistibly; he cannot rest day or night; and, like a

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heliotrope in a cellar, he writhes in his efforts to turn towards the sun he does not see. He is a man whose soul has not been dipped enough in the waters of Lethe before being bound to its body, and which retains reminiscences of eternal beauty in the heaven from which it has come, reminiscences which torture and torment it, — a soul that remembers having had wings, and now has but feet. In God's place I should deprive of poetry for two centuries the angel who was guilty of such a blunder. Instead of a house of brightly coloured cards to shelter a fair young fancy for a single springtime, a tower higher than the eight superimposed temples of Belus was required. I could not provide this and, pretending not to have understood, I left him to crawl on his wings and to find a summit whence he might spring into the vast void. He fancies I have been blind to all this, because I have lent myself to all his caprices without seeming to suspect their object. As I could not cure him, I tried to gladden him at least with the belief that he has been passionately loved, and this, I trust, will one day be accounted to me for righteousness. He excited my pity and interest quite sufficiently to make it easy for me to deceive him by tender tones and ways. I

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have played my part like a consummate actress; alternately playful and sad, sensible and amorous; feigning anxiety and jealousy, shedding false tears, and smiling at will. I adorned that imitation love with the richest of stuffs; walked with it down the avenues of my park; summoned all my birds to sing as it passed; sent it across the lake on the silvery back of my pet swan; concealed myself within it and lent it my voice, my wit, my beauty, my youth; made it so seductive that the lie was fairer than the truth. When the time comes to shatter that hollow statue I shall do it in such a way as to make him believe that I alone am to blame; and to spare him remorse, I shall myself prick the bubble. Now is not that saintly prostitution and laudable deceit? I have preserved in a crystal urn some tears that were ready to fall. These are my jewels and my jewel case, and I shall present them to the angel who shall come to take me to God.

Theodore. They are the fairest gems that can sparkle on a woman's neck, and no queen can match them. For myself, I believe the ointment the Magdalen poured out on Christ's feet was composed of the tears shed long ago by those she had consoled; and I think too that it is such tears that have made the Milky Way,

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and not, as has been claimed, drops of Juno's milk. But who shall do for you what you have done for him?

Rosette. No one, alas! since you cannot.

Theodore. Would that I could, beloved! But lose not hope; you are still very young and you are beautiful. You still have to traverse many an avenue of acacia and linden in bloom before you reach the dank road, box-bordered and with leafless trees, that leads from the porphyry tomb which shall hold your fair dead years to the undressed, moss-covered stone tomb in which shall be buried the remains of what once you were, and the tottering, wrinkled ghosts of the days of your old age. You have still to climb a long way up the hill of life, and it will be a long time ere you reach the snow-line. As yet you are in the zone of aromatic plants, of limpid cascades over which the iris hangs its tri-coloured arches, of the great green oaks and the balmy hemlocks. Ascend higher, and thence, on the broader horizon which will be outspread at your feet, you will perhaps see rising the bluish smoke of the roof where sleeps he who shall love you. You must not begin by despairing of your life; new opportunities arise which we did not expect.

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Man, as he traverses life, has often recalled to me the pilgrim who climbs the winding stair of a Gothic tower. The granite spiral twists its convolutions serpentlike, in the darkness, the steps being the scales. After the first few turns, the little daylight that comes through the door disappears. The overshadowing houses, not yet overtopped, prevent the light from filtering in through the narrow slits; the walls are dark and damp; it seems rather as if one were going down into a prison than climbing the tower which, from below, looked so graceful and tall, and as covered with lace and embroidery as if it were going to a ball. The moist darkness weighs down heavily, so that one hesitates about ascending higher. The stairs wind a few turns more and the golden trefoils of light strike the inner wall more frequently. The crocketed gables of the houses, the carving on the cornices, the quaint shape of the chimneys begin to show. A few steps farther up and the glance takes in the whole town, a mass of slender shafts, steeples, and towers uprising everywhere around, serrated, slashed, open-worked, cut out sharply with the light showing through their numerous openings. Domes and cupolas swell up like the breasts of a giantess or the skulls of

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Titans; groups of houses and palaces are plunged in shadow or bathed in light. A few steps higher and the platform is reached; then beyond the city walls are seen the green fields, the blue hills, and the white sail on the shimmering river. There is a flood of dazzling sunlight, and the swallows pass and repass with glad cries. The distant hum of the city comes up like a friendly murmur or the buzzing of a hive of bees; from every steeple pour forth sonorous, pearly notes; the winds come laden with the scent of the near-by forest and of the mountain flowers. Had one tired or become discouraged and remained seated on a step lower down, or gone back altogether, one would have missed the prospect. Sometimes, however, the tower has but a single opening, at the top or half way up; it is so with our tower of life. Then must one have more determined courage, and a perseverance armed, as it were, with stronger claws with which to cling, in the darkness, to the projections of the stones and to reach the resplendent trefoil through which the gaze can wander over the land. Sometimes, too, the loopholes have been closed up, or have been forgotten and left unpierced: then one is compelled to climb to the top; but the higher one has gone in the darkness,

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the vaster seems the prospect, the greater the pleasure and surprise.

Rosette. Heaven grant, Theodore, that I soon reach the place where the window is. I have been long enough like the staircase winding up in the gloom, and I fear the opening has been walled up and I shall have to climb to the very top. Then what if this staircase of many steps should end, after all, in a walled up door or a stone vault?

Theodore. Do not say such things, Rosette; do not think them. What architect would build a staircase leading nowhither? And why should we think the peaceful Architect of the world more stupid and improvident than an ordinary architect? God never makes a mistake and never forgets anything. It is impossible to believe that he has amused himself, just to play us a trick, with shutting us up in a long stone tube without opening or outlet. Why should you think that he would refuse to the pitiful atoms that we are their wretched momentary happiness and the imperceptible grain of millet which is their share in this great creation? He would have to be as cruel as a judge or a tiger, and, if we are so hateful to him, all he need do is to order a comet to turn slightly out of its orbit, and to strangle us all with

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a hair of its tail. How the devil can you suppose that God would take pleasure in stringing us one by one on a golden pin, as the Emperor Domitian spitted flies? God is neither a janitor nor a church-warden, and though old, is not in his dotage. All such petty malice is beneath him, and he is not fool enough to chaff us and to play us tricks. Courage, Rosette, courage. If you are morbid, stop for awhile, take breath, and then climb on. It may be that twenty steps higher up you will come upon the embrasure from which you can behold the happiness in store for you.

Rosette. Never, never! And if I chance to reach the top of the tower, it will be only that I may cast myself down headlong.

Theodore. Dear sorrowing one, drive away these gloomy thoughts that sweep around you like bats and overshadow your fair brow with their sombre wings. If you would have me love you, be happy and weep not. (He draws her gently to himself and kisses her eyes.)

Rosette. Woe is me that I ever knew you! Yet, if it were to be again, I would wish to have known you! Your rigour has been dearer to me than the love of others, and though you have made me suffer greatly, all the pleasure I have known has come to me through you.

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You have flashed through my darkness and lighted up many a dark corner of my soul; you have opened up many a new prospect in my life. To you I owe it that I know love,—hopeless love, it is true, but it is most sweet and sad at once to love without being beloved, and to remember those who forget us. It is some happiness, at least, to be able to love even with unrequited love; many die without having known it, and those most to be pitied are not those who love.

Theodore. These suffer, and their wounds burn, but at least they are conscious of living. They cling to something; they have a sun around which they revolve, a pole towards which they ardently turn. They have something to wish for; they may say to themselves: If I attain thither — if I gain that — I shall be happy. Their agony is frightful, but at least they can say, as they expire, "It is for him I die." And to die is to be reborn. Those alone are truly and irreparably unhappy whose mad embrace seeks to enfold the whole world, those who wish everything and ask nothing; and who would be embarrassed and dumb did a fay or an angel descend and suddenly say to them, "Express a wish and it shall be granted."

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Rosette. Did the fairy come, I know well what I would ask.

Theodore. Knowing it, Rosette, you are happier than I, for I do not know what wish I would form. Many vague desires uprise in me and are confounded one with another, bringing forth others which then destroy them. My wishes are like a cloud of birds circling and turning aimlessly; yours are like the eagle whose gaze is fixed upon the sun, but whom the lack of air prevents his rising upon his outspread pinions. Would I could know what it is I want! Would the idea which pursues me could come out sharp and clear from the mist which envelops it; a star, lucky or unlucky, appeared within my heaven; the light I am to follow, whether treacherous will-o'-the-wisp or kindly beacon, shone in my night; my pillar of fire went before me, even through a waterless and foodless desert; would that I knew whither I go, even if it be to the precipice's brink! To the monotonous and stupid marking time I would prefer the mad gallop of the Wild Huntsman, through copse and hollow. Such a life as mine is the life of the blindfolded horse that turns the mill-wheel and travels thousands of miles without seeing anything or changing its place. I have gone

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round long enough, and it is time the bucket were at the top.

Rosette. You are very like d'Albert in many ways, and when you are speaking I often think it is he who speaks. I have no doubt that, when you know him better, you will become greatly attached to him. You cannot fail to agree. Like you he feels aimless aspirations; he loves greatly without knowing what he loves; he would ascend to heaven, for earth he counts a footstool scarce good enough for his feet; and he is prouder than Lucifer before his fall.

Theodore. I feared at first he might be one of that numerous brood of poets who have driven poetry from this earth, one of those stringers-on of imitation pearls who have no thought but for the last syllable of a word, and who, when they have rimed *heart* and *part*, *love* and *dove*, *shadow* and *morrow*, conscientiously fold their arms, cross their legs, and allow the spheres to complete their revolutions.

Rosette. He is not of those. His verses are less than he, and do not express him completely. To judge him by what he has done would give a very false impression of him; he is himself his real poem, and I am not sure that he will ever compose another. He holds within

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his soul a bevy of lovely thoughts which he surrounds with a triple wall, and of which he is more jealous than ever a sultan was of his odalisques. He puts into his verse those thoughts only that he cares not for or that he is tired of; it is his way of getting rid of them, and the world gets only that which he cares for no longer.

Theodore. I can understand his reserve and jealousy. So many people own to having loved only when they love no more, and acknowledge their mistresses only when they are dead.

Rosette. It is very difficult to possess anything to one's self in this world, for every torch attracts so many butterflies, and every treasure so many thieves. I like the silent ones who carry away their thought into the tomb, and refuse to have it soiled by the filthy kisses and obscene touch of the crowd. I like those lovers who never cut their mistress's name upon a tree, never confide it to an echo, and fear, even when asleep, that a dream may lead them to say it. I am of them: I have never told my thought, and none shall know of my love. . . . But it is almost eleven, my dear Theodore, and I am keeping you from a much needed rest. When I have to leave you my heart always sinks within me and I feel as if it were the last time we

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were to meet. I delay as long as I can, but go I must at last. Now, good-night, for I am afraid d'Albert will come to look for me. Good-bye, dear friend.

Theodore put his arm round her and led her thus to the door; then he stopped and long followed her with his glance; there were at intervals in the corridor little narrow-paned windows lighted up by the moonlight, which produced a very fantastic alternation of light and shadow. As the white, pure figure of Rosette passed each window it shone as if it were a silvery phantom, then it disappeared to reappear more brilliant a little farther away, and finally it vanished altogether.

Theodore, apparently sunk in deep thought, remained for some time motionless, with folded arms, then he passed his hand over his brow, tossed back his hair, re-entered the room, and went to bed after kissing the page, still sound asleep.

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VII

As soon as Rosette was awake, d'Albert hastened, in a way that was unusual with him, to call upon her.

"I should say you had come very early," said Rosette, "if you could ever be early as far as I am concerned. So, to reward you for your compliment, I permit you to kiss my hand."

And she drew from under the sheet of Flanders linen, edged with lace, the prettiest hand ever seen at the end of a plump, round arm.

D'Albert kissed it devoutly. "And what about the other, the little sister?" he said. "Is it not to be kissed too?"

"Why, certainly, if you wish it. I am in my kindest mood to-day, so there!"

And she drew out the other hand, with which she lightly tapped him on the mouth.

"Am I not the best-natured woman in the world?"

"You are grace itself, and white marble temples should be built in your honour in myrtle groves. I absolutely fear Psyche's fate for you, and the jealousy

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of Venus," said d'Albert, taking the beauty's two hands and raising them to his lips.

"You recite that like a book," said Rosette, with a delightful little pout. "It sounds like something you have committed to memory."

"Not at all. You are well worth making a phrase expressly for you, and you ought to have the first hearing of madrigals," replied d'Albert.

"Now what bee has stung you to-day? You are so polite that I fear you must be ill; I am afraid you will die. Do you know that it is a very bad omen for any one's character to change without any apparent reason for it? And as it is an established fact, in the eyes of all the women who have taken pains to love you, that you are habitually a most sulky person, so is it equally sure that you are at this moment most charming and most unaccountably amiable. The truth is, my poor d'Albert, that you are very pale. Let me have your arm, I want to feel your pulse." And she pushed back his sleeve and counted the pulsations with comic gravity. "No, you are as well as can be, and have not the least symptom of fever. I must, then, be uncommonly pretty this morning. Fetch me my glass, that I may see how far your compliments are justified.

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D'Albert fetched a small mirror from the toilet table and laid it on the bed.

"No," said Rosette, "you were not so far wrong. Why do you not write a sonnet about my eyes, Sir Poet? There is no reason why you should not. Am I not most unfortunate? I have beautiful eyes and a handsome poet, and withal I get just as few sonnets as if I were blind of one eye and had a water-carrier for a lover. You do not love me, sir; you have not written even an acrostic sonnet. And what of my mouth? What think you of it? Yet I have kissed you with that mouth, and may kiss you again, you dark beauty, though you scarcely deserve it — this morning, however, you deserve anything. But do not let me speak of myself all the time; let us speak of you. You are marvellously handsome and bright this morning, you look like Aurora's brother; and though it is scarcely daylight you are already dressed and adorned as if for a call. Have you perchance any designs upon me? Are you thinking of treacherously overcoming my virtue? Do you wish to make a conquest of me? I forgot, though; that is already done and is an old story."

"Do not joke like that, Rosette; you know very well that I love you."

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"That depends. I am not so sure of it. Are you?"

"Most certain; and more by token, if you will be good enough to order no one to be admitted, I shall try to prove it, and shall, I venture to think, prove it conclusively."

"That I will not do. Much as I should like to be convinced, my door remains open. I am too pretty to be pretty in private; the sun shines for everybody, and my beauty is, with your leave, going to imitate the sun to-day."

"On my honour, it is not with my leave. But do as you please; I am your most humble slave and lay my will at your feet."

"That is very pretty. Keep these sentiments, and do not lock your door this evening."

"The Chevalier Theodore de Sérannes," said, from between the half-opened leaves of the door, a negress with big, round, smiling face, "desires to pay his respects and begs to be received."

"Show in the chevalier," said Rosette, pulling the sheet up to her chin.

Theodore first went up to Rosette's bed, made a low and graceful bow, which she returned with a friendly

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nod, and then turned towards d'Albert, to whom he bowed with an open and courteous manner.

"What were you saying?" he inquired. "I dare say I interrupted an interesting conversation. Pray go on, and tell me in a few words what it was about."

"Oh, no!" replied Rosette, smiling provokingly, "we were talking business."

Theodore sat down at the foot of the bed, d'Albert, as the first-comer, having sat down at the head, and the conversation went on for some time, passing from one subject to another, very witty, bright, and lively; therefore we shall not relate it, lest it should lose too much in the transcription. The look, the tone, the vivacity of words and gestures, the thousand ways of saying a thing, all the wit which, like the foam of champagne, sparkles and disappears at once, are impossible to fix and to reproduce. The reader must fill up the blank for himself, and imagine that here follow five or six pages filled with the most delicate, most capricious, most delightfully fantastic, refined, and coruscating conversation.

We are well aware that we are making use of an artifice which recalls that adopted by Timanthes, who, despairing of painting properly Agamemnon's face,

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cast a cloak over the head; but we prefer timidity to imprudence.

It might be well, perhaps, to seek out the motives which had led d'Albert to rise so early, and had induced him to call on Rosette at such an hour, just as if he still loved her. It is probable that he felt, though he would not confess to, a slight feeling of secret jealousy. Assuredly he did not care very much for Rosette, and would even have been very glad to get rid of her, but he wished at least to be the one who gave up, and not the one who is given up, which latter position always hurts deeply a man's pride, absolutely dead though his first love may be.

Theodore was such a handsome young fellow that it was difficult to see him break in upon a love affair without fearing a result which had already happened many a time, namely, that all eyes turned to him and all hearts too. The strange thing was that, although he had captivated many a woman, none of their lovers had retained that persistent resentment which one usually entertains towards people who have supplanted you. He had such an overmastering charm in all his ways, and was so naturally gracious, gentle, and proud that men, even, felt the spell. D'Albert, who had

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come to Rosette's room with the intention of being very short with Theodore if he met him there, was greatly surprised at not feeling in the least angry and at yielding so readily to his advances. At the end of half an hour you would have taken them for old friends; yet d'Albert felt internally convinced that if ever Rosette loved, Theodore would be the man, and he had every reason to be jealous, as regarded the future at least, for he did not suspect anything in the present — though had he seen her in a white wrapper glide, like a night-moth on a moonbeam, into the handsome young man's room and not leave it until three or four hours later, and then with many precautions, he might, in truth, have believed himself much more unhappy than he was; for it is not usual to see a pretty and amorous woman leave the room of a no less handsome man just as she was when she entered.

Rosette listened to Theodore very attentively, as one listens to a beloved one, but what he said was so bright and entertaining that her attention was quite natural and intelligible, so d'Albert was not in the least offended by it. As for Theodore, he was polite and friendly towards Rosette, but nothing more.

"What shall we do to-day, Theodore?" said Ro-

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sette. "Shall we go boating or hunting? What think you?"

"Let us hunt; it is less doleful than gliding over the water in company with a bored swan, and crushing lily leaves on either side. Do you not think so, d'Albert?"

"For my part I had as lief glide with the stream in a skiff as gallop headlong in pursuit of a poor animal; but where you go, I go. We had best now give Madame Rosette a chance to get up and put on a suitable dress."

Rosette nodded in assent and rang for her maid. The two young men went off arm in arm, and it was easy to guess, on seeing them so friendly, that the one was the declared lover and the other the real lover of the same lady.

Everybody was soon ready. D'Albert and Theodore were already on horseback in the outer court, when Rosette, in riding dress, appeared at the top of the steps. Her dress gave her a gay and deliberate look which became her to perfection. She sprang into her saddle with her customary quickness, and touched with her whip her horse, that went off at score. D'Albert spurred his and soon joined her. Theodore allowed

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them to get ahead, feeling sure of overtaking them when he pleased. He seemed to be waiting for something and often turned towards the mansion.

"Theodore! Theodore! Come along! Is your horse made of wood?" cried Rosette.

Theodore cantered off and diminished the distance between Rosette and himself, though he still remained in the rear.

He again looked towards the mansion, which was beginning to disappear in the distance. A cloud of dust, in which moved rapidly something not yet discernible, appeared at the end of the road. In a few minutes the cloud was by Theodore's side, and opening, like the classic clouds of the Iliad, showed the fresh and rosy face of the mysterious page.

"Come along, Theodore!" cried Rosette for the second time; "spur up that slow-coach of yours and ride beside us."

Theodore's steed had been impatiently prancing and plunging, and when Theodore gave it its head he quickly caught up to and passed Rosette and d'Albert, leaving them a few lengths behind him.

"Who loves me, follows me," called out Theodore, leaping a four-foot fence. "Well, Sir Poet," he said

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on landing on the other side, "you balk at the jump, though a poet's steed is said to be winged."

"All the same, I had rather look for a gate," said d'Albert, with a smile. "I have but one head to break; had I more, I should try the jump too."

"So no one loves me, since no one follows me," said Theodore, drawing down still more the drawn-down corners of his mouth.

The little page looked at him reproachfully out of his great blue eyes and pressed his knees to his horse's flanks.

The horse made a prodigious leap.

"Yes, one does," said the page after clearing the fence.

Rosette cast a strange look at the lad and blushed to the eyes; then lashing her mare across the neck she also leapt the bright-green wooden fence which bounded the avenue.

"And I, Theodore, — do you think I do not love you?"

The lad cast a sidelong glance at her and drew nearer to Theodore.

D'Albert was already half-way down the avenue and missed the whole scene, for it has at all times

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been the privilege of fathers, husbands, and lovers to be blind.

"Isnabel," said Theodore, "you are crazy; and so are you, Rosette. You did not take room enough for your jump, Isnabel; and you, Rosette, nearly caught your dress on the posts. You might have killed yourself."

"What would that have mattered?" replied Rosette, with so sad and melancholy an accent that Isnabel forgave her for having also leaped the fence.

They rode on for some little time and reached the cross-roads where they were to join the pack and the huntsmen. Six avenues, cut in the overarching forest, ended at a little hexagonal stone tower, on each face of which was engraved the name of the road which ended there. The trees rose to such a height that they seemed to seek to catch the light wisps of cloud driven past their tops by a fresh breeze; the grass was tall and thick; dense brushwood offered retreats and holds to the game, and everything promised a successful hunt. It was a regular old-fashioned forest, with old oaks past the century mark, such as are not now met with, since trees are no longer planted and one cannot wait for those already planted to grow up; an ancestral forest,

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planted by great-grandfathers for the fathers, by the fathers for the grandsons, with roads of marvellous width, an obelisk topped by a round ball, a fountain with rock-work, the inevitable pool, and the keepers with hair powdered white, buck-skin breeches and sky-blue coats, — a thick, dark forest, against which stand out splendidly the white-satin cruppers of Wouverman's big horses, and the big mouths of the Dampierre horns which Parrocel is so fond of putting on the back of huntsmen.

A multitude of dog's tails, crescent and scythe-shaped, were wagging in a cloud of light dust. The signal was given, the hounds, straining at their leash, uncoupled, and the hunt began.

We shall not describe in detail the turnings and twistings of the stag through the forest; we do not even know whether it was a stag of ten tines, spite of all our investigations — which is really a great pity. We are of opinion, however, that in so old, so thick, so lordly a forest there could be royal stags only, and we see no reason why the one after which were galloping, on differently coloured steeds and *non passibus æquis*, the four principal characters of this illustrious novel, should not have been an antlered monarch of the glade.

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The stag ran like a deer, naturally spurred on to top speed by the twenty-five couples of hounds at his heels. The pace was so fast that the pack gave tongue but at intervals.

Theodore, being best mounted and the best rider, rode close to the hounds with incredible ardour; d'Albert was not far from him. Rosette and Isnabel followed at a distance which increased every moment, and ere long was such that they could not hope to catch up with the leaders.

"Suppose we pull up," said Rosette, "and breathe the horses a bit? The hunt is swinging round the pond, and I know of a short cut by which we can be in at the death as soon as the rest."

Isnabel reined in his little mountain-horse, which bent low its head, tossing over its eyes the hanging locks of its mane, and pawed the ground.

This little horse contrasted strongly with Rosette's: it was black as a coal, the other milk-white; its full mane and tail were wild-looking; Rosette's had its mane plaited with blue ribbon and its tail combed out and curled. It looked like a unicorn, and the other like a poodle.

The same contrast was noticeable in the riders.

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Rosette's hair was as dark as Isnabel's was fair; she had strongly marked eyebrows, while the page's were scarce darker than his skin and resembled the bloom of peach. The complexion of the one was as dazzling and unmistakable as the noon-day light; the other's resembled the blush and transparency of dawn.

"Shall we try to catch up with the hounds now?" said Isnabel to Rosette. "Our horses have had time to get their second wind."

"Let us away, then," replied the lovely horsewoman; and they galloped off down a rather narrow cross-path leading to the pond. The two horses galloped side by side, almost filling up the pathway.

On Isnabel's side a gnarled and knotty trunk stretched out a great limb which seemed to threaten the horsemen. The lad did not see it.

"Take care," cried Rosette; "lie low, or you will be thrown!"

The advice came just too late; the limb caught Isnabel in the waist and he lost his stirrups. The horse galloping on and the limb not bending, the lad was pulled out of the saddle and thrown heavily, fainting with the shock. Rosette, greatly terrified,

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dismounted swiftly and hastened to the apparently lifeless page.

His cap had fallen off, and his beautiful fair hair fell in waves upon the sandy soil. His small hands, opened wide, seemed to be of wax, so pale were they. Rosette knelt by him and tried to bring him back to consciousness. She had neither salts nor strong waters with her and was greatly embarrassed. At last she perceived a fairly deep rut in which rain water had accumulated and settled. She dipped her fingers in it, greatly to the terror of a little frog, the naiad of that wave, and splashed a few drops on the blue temples of the young page, who did not seem to feel them, the beads coursing down his blanched cheeks like a sylph's tears down a lily leaf. Rosette, thinking his clothes needed loosening, unbuckled his belt, unbuttoned his tunic, and undid his shirt to enable him to breathe more freely. She then beheld a sight which, to a man, would have been the most delightful of surprises, but which did not appear to cause her pleasure, for her brow bent and her lip trembled slightly — she beheld a very white bosom, not yet fully developed, but which held out the most enchanting promises and already fulfilled many: round, polished, ivory breasts, to speak

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like Ronsard's imitators, most delightful to gaze upon and more delicious still to kiss.

"A woman!" said Rosette. "A woman! Oh, Theodore!"

Isnabel, as we shall still call her, though it was not her name, breathed again softly and half opened her heavy eyelids. She was not hurt in any way, — merely stunned; she sat up, and, with Rosette's help, was able to rise and mount her horse, which, on feeling its rider fall, had stopped short.

They rode slowly to the pond, where they came up with the hunt, as they expected. Rosette, in a few words, told Theodore what had happened. The latter changed colour more than once in the course of the narration, and during the rest of the ride kept close by Isnabel's side.

The party returned early to the house, and the day, which had begun so brightly, ended rather sadly.

Rosette was pensive and d'Albert also seemed sunk in thought. The reader will soon learn the reason of this.

END OF VOL. I

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Mademoiselle De Maupin

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MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

VIII

NO, my dear Silvio, no; I have not forgotten you. I am not of those who go through life without ever looking back. My past follows me and treads upon the heels of the present, and even of the future; your friendship is one of the sunlit spots that stand out most distinctly on the already blue horizon of my latter years: often, from the height I have reached, I turn round to contemplate it with a smile of ineffable melancholy.

What fair days those were! How angelically pure were we! Our feet scarce touched the ground; we felt as though we wore wings, our desires carried us up and away, and the springtime breeze caused the golden halo of youth to wave about our brows.

Do you remember the islet of poplars at the fork of the stream? To reach it we had to cross by a pretty long and very narrow plank that gave in the centre;

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a regular goat's bridge, scarce used, in fact, but by the goats, — it was charming. Short, thick grass, in which bloomed the pretty little winking blue eyes of the forget-me-not; a path yellow as nankeen, that was the belt of the isle's green robe and encircled its waist; an ever tremulous shade of quivering aspen and poplar, — these were not the least delights of this paradise. Great webs of linen, which women stretched out there to bleach in the dew, looked like squares of snow. And do you remember that brown, sunburned little lass, whose great wild eyes shone so brightly under the locks of her long hair, and who ran after the goats threatening them with her waving willow wand when they made as though they would step on the linen she was appointed to guard? And the sulphur-yellow butterflies, with their fluttering, erratic flight; and the kingfisher that had its nest in the thick alders, and that we so often tried to catch? And the steep ways that led down to the river, with the roughly cut steps, the posts and the stakes green at the bottom, that were almost always closed by a lattice of plants and branches? What limpid water it was, and what a sheen upon it, with its bed of golden gravel showing through, and what a pleasure it was to sit on the bank and let our feet dip into

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it! The water-lilies with their yellow blooms looked, as they spread out, like the green locks on the polished shoulders of a naiad bathing. The sky reflected itself in this mirror with azure smiles and the most ravishing pearly-grey light; at every hour of the day it scattered turquoises and spangles, soft wool and shimmering silks in endless variety. And how I loved those squadrons of little ducks, with emerald necks, that sailed unceasingly from shore to shore, rippling the smooth surface of the stream!

We were indeed well fitted to be the figures in this landscape; we did indeed become that gentle and restful scene and readily did we harmonise with it. Springtime without, youth within, sunshine on the turf, a smile on our lips, a snowy shower of blossoms on every bush, in our souls a bloom of candid illusions, the same chaste blush on the wild rose and on our cheeks, poesy singing in our hearts, unseen birds warbling in the trees — light, and cooing of doves, scents and numberless mingled murmurs, beating hearts, and ripple of water over pebbles, grass growing and thoughts springing, a drop of water gliding on calyx-tip, tear-drop trembling on eyelash, a love sigh and a rustling of leaves . . . — oh! what evenings we have spent walk-

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ing slowly there, so close to the edge that often we had one foot in the water and one on the ground.

Alas! it did not last long, for me at least; you, on the other hand, managed to retain the innocence of the child even while acquiring the knowledge of man. The germ of corruption that was in me grew fast, and gangrene pitilessly devoured all that I had of pure and holy. My friendship for you is the one good thing that has remained to me.

I am in the habit of concealing nothing of my thoughts or deeds from you. I have laid bare to you the most secret fibres of my heart; no matter how absurd, ridiculous, eccentric may be the motions of my soul, to you I must tell them; but in very truth what I have been feeling for some time is so utterly strange that I scarce dare own it even to myself. I told you once that I was afraid that by dint of seeking to find Beauty and striving to reach it I should fall at length into the impossible or the monstrous. I have almost got to that point. When shall I get away from all those cross currents that carry me now this way and now that? When will my vessel's deck cease to tremble under me as it is swept by the waves of all these storms? Where can I find a haven in which I may cast anchor; a

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firmly fixed rock, out of reach of the seas, on which I may dry myself and press the foam from out my hair ?

You know with what ardour I have sought physical beauty, what importance I attach to external form, and what deep love I feel for the visible world. It must be that I am too corrupt, too disillusioned to believe in moral beauty and to seek after it perseveringly. I have wholly lost the knowledge of good and evil, and by dint of depravation I have almost got back to the ignorance of a child or a savage. The truth is that nothing strikes me as praiseworthy or blameworthy, and the strangest actions hardly astonish me. My conscience has become deaf and dumb. Adultery seems to me the most innocent thing in the world; I think it quite natural that a young girl should prostitute herself. I feel as though I should betray my friends without the least remorse, and I should have no scruple whatever in pushing over the edge of a precipice people who happened to be in my way, if I were walking along the brink with them. I could look on coldly at the most atrocious scenes, and there is something not displeasing to me in the sufferings and woes of humanity. When some calamity befalls our world I experience

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the same sensation of biting, bitter pleasure that comes to us when we at last avenge an insult of long standing.

What hast thou done to me, O world, that I hate thee so? What has made me so bitter against thee? What did I look for from thee that I bear thee such rancorous grudge for having deceived me? What high hopes hast thou failed to fulfil? What eaglet's pinions hast thou pruned? What gates were they thou wert to open and kept closed, and which of us has proved untrue to the other?

Naught touches, naught moves me. I no longer feel, as I listen to the tale of heroic deeds, the splendid thrill that formerly fired my whole being. Indeed the whole business strikes me as rather childish. No accents strike deep enough to stir my relaxed heart-strings and to make them vibrate; I watch my fellow-men weep just as I watch the rain fall, unless their tears are of purer water, reflect the light picturesquely, and course down a lovely cheek. It is for animals only that I still feel some slight pity. I should not interfere if a peasant or a servant were mauled with blows, but I would not allow a horse or a dog to be so treated in my presence. Yet I am not cruel, I have

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never harmed any one and am not likely to do so; this, however, is rather the result of my idlesse and of the supreme contempt I feel for all people whom I dislike, a contempt which will not allow me to have aught to do with them, even for the purpose of hurting them. I abhor everybody in the lump, and in the mass I scarce distinguish one or two worthy of being particularly hated. To hate any one is to think about him as much as if you loved him; it means that you pick out that person and separate him from the multitude; that you are in a state of excitement about him; that you have him in mind when waking and dream of him when sleeping; that you tear at your pillow and gnash your teeth as you remember that he lives. What more do men do for those they love? Would one take the pains and trouble in order to please one's love that one takes to harm an enemy? I doubt it. In order to hate any one properly, you must love some one else. Every deep hatred is the counterpoise of some deep love; whom, then, can I hate, — I who love nothing?

Hatred in me is like love, — a vague, undetermined feeling which seeks to settle on something and fails to do so. I bear within me a crushing treasure of

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love and hatred that I know not what to do with. If I do not find some way of expending one or the other or both, I shall burst, like a bag so crammed with money that its seams give way and rip open. Oh! if only I could hate some one — if only some one of these dullards with whom I live would insult me so as to make my cold serpent-blood boil within my icy veins, and draw me from the dead somnolence in which I stagnate; if only thou wert to bite my cheek with thy rat-teeth, wretched old witch with the shaking head, and inoculate me with thy venom and rabies; if only some one's death could become life for me; if the last heart-beat of a foe writhing under my heel could lift my hair with thrills of delight and the smell of his blood be sweeter to my thirsty nostrils than the scent of flowers, — how willingly would I give up love and count myself happy!

Then should deadly embraces, a tiger rending his prey, boas choking the life out of their victims with their mighty coils, elephants crushing and flattening out a chest with crackling noise, the scorpion's sting, the milky juice of the euphorbia, the many-curved Malay creese, the blades that shine in the night and whose gleam disappears in blood — take for me the

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place of plucked rose-petals, of moist kisses and of love-clasps!

I love nothing, did I say? Alas! I now fear that I do love something. And better a thousand times to hate than to love as I do. I have at last met the type of beauty of which I have dreamed so long. My phantom has taken shape; I have beheld it; it has spoken to me; I have pressed its hand; it is a living creature, and not a chimera. Well did I know I could not be mistaken, and that my presentiments were never false. Yes, Silvio; I stand by the side of the dream of my life; here is my room, and there the one in which it dwells. I can see from here the flutter of the window curtain and the light of the lamp. Its shadow was but now cast upon the blind, and in another hour we shall sup together.

Those glorious Eastern eyelids, that clear, deep glance, that warm tint of pale amber, the long, lustrous black hair, the nose so delicate and high-bred in shape, the wrists and ankles, the feet and the hands, shapely and well turned as in Parmegianino's figures, the exquisite curves, the perfect oval of the face, which make the head so elegant and aristocratic, — all that I sought for, all that I should have been grateful for had I found it

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divided up among five or six people, — I have all that united in one person.

Of all things on earth, I most admire beautiful hands. Could you but see these, how perfect they are, how white, how soft, how penetratingly fresh to the touch; how fine the shape of the long fingers, how perfect the contour of the nails, how polished and brilliant, even as the inner petal of a rose! The much bepraised and famous hands of Anne of Austria were, in comparison with these, but the hands of a turkey-herd or of a scullion. Then the grace, the art in the least motions of these hands; the graceful bend of the little finger slightly parted from the others. It drives me crazy to think of those hands; my lips tremble and burn; I close mine eyes so as to see them not, but with their delicate fingers they touch my eyelashes and open my eyelids, and a thousand visions of ivory and snow-whiteness pass before me.

Surely it is Satan's claw which has assumed the outward form of that fair hand; some sarcastic demon is playing with me; there is witchcraft in this, for it is too monstrously impossible.

That hand . . . I am off to Italy to see the works of the great masters, to study, compare, draw, to become

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a painter in short, in order to reproduce it as it is, as I see it, as I feel it. Perhaps I may thus rid myself of this sort of obsession.

I longed for beauty without knowing what I was longing for. It is like trying to look at the sun with unclosed eyelids, like trying to handle fire. I am suffering atrociously from my inability to assimilate this perfection, to enter into it, to make it enter into me, to depict it, to make it felt. When I see a beautiful thing I yearn to touch it with my whole being, in every part and at one and the same moment; I would sing it and paint it, carve it and write of it, be loved by it as I love it; I long for what cannot be and never can be.

Your letter hurt me, hurt me deeply. Forgive my saying so. All the calm, innocent happiness you are enjoying, your walks in autumn-tinted woods, your long, tender, intimate talks that end with a chaste kiss on the brow, that life apart and serene, the days that pass so quickly that night seems to come too early, — make the state of internal agitation in which I am living appear still more tempestuous. And so you are to be married in a couple of months; all obstacles have been cleared away, and you are now sure of being each

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other's forever. Your happiness of to-day is increased by all your future happiness. You are happy, and are sure of being happier yet very soon. How lucky you are! Your love is fair, but what you love in her is not dead, palpable, material beauty, but eternal and invisible beauty, ever young, the beauty of the soul. She is full of grace and candour, and loves you as such souls as hers know how to love. You did not ask yourself whether her golden hair resembled in tone the hair of the women of Rubens and Giorgione; it delighted you because it was her hair. I dare wager, you lucky lover, that you do not even know whether your love's beauty is of the Greek or the Asiatic, the English or the Italian type. Few indeed, Silvio, are the hearts which are satisfied with pure and simple love, and that ask for no retreat in the forests, no garden on an isle of Lago Maggiore.

Had I the courage to tear myself from this place, I would go and spend a month with you. Perhaps I should become purer, breathing the air you breathe; perhaps your shadowy walks would refresh somewhat my burning brow. But I may not; yours is a Paradise wherein I cannot set foot. Scarcely am I permitted to behold from afar, beyond the wall, the

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two fair angels that walk in it, hand in hand, glance meeting glance. Only as a serpent may Satan enter into Eden, and not for all the happiness in heaven, dear Adam, would I play the serpent to your Eve.

What is the fearful work which has been going on in my soul recently, and what is it that has changed my blood into venom? What poison wind deposited in it the germ from which thou hast sprung, O monstrous thought that spreadest thy pale-green boughs and thy hemlock sprays in the icy shadow of my heart? This it is, then, for which I was reserved; in this were all these paths, tried in such desperation, to end! O fate, how thou dost sport with us! All my eagle-like soarings towards the sun, all those heaven-aspiring fires, my divine melancholy, my deep, reserved love, my cult of beauty, that dainty and quaint fancy of mine, that internal spring, inexhaustible and ever-welling, ecstasy with ever outspread wings, reverie blooming more freely than the May, all the poetry of my youth, — all these rare, fair gifts were but to serve to make me the very vilest of men!

I longed for love. I went about madly calling upon and invoking it; I raged as I felt my powerlessness; I excited my hot blood, I dragged my body into the

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mire of pleasure; I pressed with almost deadly clasp to my barren breast a young and beautiful woman who loved me — I pursued passion fleeing from me. I have prostituted myself; I have done as might do a maiden taking her way to a brothel in hopes of finding a lover among the men urged thither by debauchery, instead of waiting patiently, in discreet and silent retirement, until the angel God meant for me appeared in a luminous halo with a flower of heaven in its hand. The years I have squandered in puerile excitement, in going hither and thither, in seeking to force nature and time, I ought to have spent in solitude and meditation, in endeavouring to make myself worthy of being loved. That would have been the part of wisdom. But there were scales on my eyes, and I walked straight to the precipice. One foot is already over the brink, and the other, I think, will soon follow. In vain I resist; I feel that I must plunge into this new abyss that has just opened within me.

And that is indeed what I fancied love would prove to be. I now feel what I had only imagined before. This is indeed the dread and delightful insomnia which turns roses into thistles and thistles into roses; this is the sweet sorrow and the wretched happiness, the

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ineffable emotion which wraps you round with a golden cloud and makes the outlines of things quiver before your eyes as does intoxication; the sound in the ears in which is always heard the last syllable of the beloved name, the blanchings and the blushings, the sudden thrills, the burning and the icy sweats — it is love indeed, and the poets have spoken the truth.

When I am about to enter the room where we are wont to meet, my heart beats with such violence that it may be seen through my clothes, and I have to press it with both hands lest it escape me. If I perceive the object of my love at the end of an avenue, in the park, distance disappears at once and I know not what has become of the road: the devil has made off with it or I have wings. Nothing can take my thoughts from that form. Am I reading? — it comes in between the book and me. Do I ride? — I gallop at full speed, and fancy I feel in the rush of air its long hair mingling with mine, and its quick, warm breath on my cheek. That image haunts me, follows me everywhere, and is never more visible than when I do not see it.

You pitied me for that I did not love. Pity me now for that I do love, and chiefly for loving what

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I love. Oh, the wretchedness of it! Oh, the fatal axe-stroke on a life already so maimed! What mad, guilty, odious passion has seized upon me! The shame of it reddens my brow with inextinguishable blush. Of all my aberrations this is the most deplorable; I cannot understand it; all in me is confused and upset. I know no longer who I am or what others are; I wonder whether I am man or woman; I hold myself in horror; strange, inexplicable feelings arise in me, and there are times when I feel as if my reason were leaving me and I lose all grasp of existence. For a long time I could not believe what had come to me; I watched and observed myself carefully; I tried to unravel the betwisted skein of the thought in my soul, and at last I discerned the dreadful truth, through all the veils in which it wrapped itself . . . Silvio, I am in love . . . Oh! no, I never can say it . . . I am in love with a man!

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IX

IT is so. I am in love with a man, Silvio. Long did I try to blind myself to the truth, giving a different name to the feeling I experienced, clothing it in the garb of pure and disinterested friendship. I fancied it was but the admiration I feel for beautiful people and beautiful things; for days I wandered along the smiling and treacherous paths that wind about every nascent love, but now I see clearly into what a deep and terrible track I have turned. I cannot conceal it from myself: I have subjected myself to a rigid self-examination; I have coolly weighed every circumstance, reasoned out the minutest detail, probed my soul in every part with that accuracy that comes of the habit of self-study. I blush to think it, to write it, but the fact, alas! is but too evident: I love that youth, not with a friend's affection, but with a lover's ardour.

You whom I have so dearly loved, O Silvio, my trusty, my only comrade, you never awoke such feelings in me, and yet if ever there was under heaven a close and lively friendship, if ever two souls,

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though different, thoroughly understood each other, that friendship was ours, those two souls were ours. What swift-winged hours have we not spent together! what endless talks, ever too soon ended, have we not had! what things have we not said to each other that are never said! In the heart of each of us there was that window Momus would have inserted in man's side. How proud I was of being your friend, — I who was younger than you, I who was so erratic, and you who were so sensible!

My feelings towards this youth are absolutely incredible; never has any woman so singularly moved me. The clear and silvery tone of his voice enervates and excites me strangely; my soul hangs upon his lips, as the bee lights on the flower, to suck in the honey of his words. I cannot touch him as I brush past without being thrilled from head to foot, and at night, when we part and he holds out his adorable hand, so soft, so satin-like, all my blood rushes to the spot he has touched, and an hour later I still feel the pressure of his fingers.

This morning I watched him a long time without being perceived by him. I was concealed behind my window-curtain, while he was at his window, which is

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exactly opposite mine. This part of the mansion was built at the close of the reign of Henry IV., half of stone, half of brick, as was the fashion then. The window is tall and narrow, with stone lintel and balcony. Theodore — for you have already guessed that it was he — was leaning on the rail with a melancholy air and appeared to be deep in thought. A large, flowered, red-damask curtain, partly caught up, hung in broad folds behind him and formed a background. How handsome he was, and how splendidly his dark hair and pale face stood out against that deep red! Two thick locks of black, lustrous hair, like the bunches of grapes of the Erigone of the ancients, fell gracefully down his cheeks and framed in most charmingly the perfectly true oval contour of his fair face. His plump, rounded neck was quite bare, and he wore a sort of dressing-gown with wide sleeves that looked not unlike a woman's gown. In his hand he held a yellow tulip, that he pitilessly tore to bits while sunk in thought, and the petals of which he cast to the winds.

One of the luminous angles cast by the sun upon the wall was projected upon the window, and the picture was gilded with a warm, transparent tone which

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the most shimmering painting of Giorgione might have envied.

His long hair, gently lifted by the breeze, his bare, white neck, his long gown drawn in round the waist, his lovely hands issuing from the sleeves like the pistils of a flower from out the petals, made him look, not the handsomest of men, but the most beautiful of women, and I said to myself, "It is a woman! oh! it is a woman!" Then I suddenly recollected a mad thing. I wrote you long ago — you remember — about my ideal love and the way in which I should certainly meet her: the fair lady in the Louis XIII park, the white and red *château*, the great terrace, the walks lined with old horse-chestnut trees and the glimpse of her at the window. I told you all that in detail. And this was it; what I beheld was the exact realisation of my dream; the very style of architecture, the effect of light, the kind of beauty, the colour and the character I had desired; nothing was lacking, only — the lady was a man, although I own that for the moment I had forgotten it completely.

I am convinced that Theodore is a woman in disguise; it is impossible that it should be otherwise. Beauty so excessive, even in a woman, is not virile

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beauty, even if the man were Antinoüs, Hadrian's friend, or Alexis, Vergil's friend. She is a woman, by Jove! and I was a fool to worry myself as I have been doing. This settles the difficulty in the simplest possible way, and I am not so much of a monster as I believed.

God would never fringe the dirty eyelids of a man with such long, brown, silky lashes, or flush with such bright and soft carmine our ugly, thick-lipped, hairy mouths. Our bones, roughly cut out and set in, are not worth clothing in such white and delicate flesh; our bumpy craniums are not fit to be framed in the waves of such lovely hair.

O Beauty, we have been created only to love and worship thee, if we have found thee; to seek thee unceasingly in this world, if that good fortune has not been ours; but to possess thee, to be ourselves Beauty, that is given but to angels and women. Lovers, poets, painters, and sculptors, we all strive to build altars to thee; the lover in his mistress, the poet in his song, the painter on his canvas, the sculptor with his marble; but our everlasting despair is that we are unable to render palpable the beauty we feel, and that we are enclosed in a frame which does

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not fulfil the ideal of the body which we know should be ours.

I once saw a young man who had stolen the body I ought to have had. The rascal was exactly what I would have liked to be. He had the beauty of my ugliness, and by his side I looked like a rough sketch of him. He was of my height, but better made and stronger; his figure resembled mine, but had an elegance and a nobility mine lacks. His eyes were of the same colour as mine, but his glance flashed as mine never will. His nose was cast in the same mould as mine; only, it seemed to have been retouched with the chisel of a skilful sculptor: his nostrils were more open and vigorous, the flat parts more sharply outlined, and his nose had about it something heroic which is utterly wanting in mine. It seemed as though nature had tried to make out of me this improved myself. I looked like the rough, corrected draft of the thought of which he was the beautifully written copy. When I saw him walk, stop, bow to ladies, sit or lie down, with the perfect grace which is the outcome of the beauty of proportion, I felt atrociously sad and jealous, as must feel the clay model which dries and cracks unnoticed in a

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corner of the studio, while the proud marble statue — which but for the model would not exist — stands splendid upon its carved pedestal and attracts the attention and the praise of the visitors. For, after all, that rascal is only myself more successfully done, and cast in less rebellious bronze which has more accurately entered the hollows in the mould. It is pretty bold of him, I think, to parade around in the shape which is mine, and to be as insolent as if he were an original type; when all is said and done he is merely a plagiarist of me, for I was born before him and but for me nature would never have thought of turning him out as he is. When the ladies sang the praises of his fine manners and the charm of his person, I felt impelled to get up and say to them, "You fools, praise me to my face; for that gentleman is myself, and it is wasting time to say to him what is due to me." At other times I felt the liveliest desire to strangle him and to turn his soul out of that body which belonged to me; I used to prowl around him with tight-drawn lips and clenched fists, like a nobleman who prowls round his palace in which a family of rapscallions have settled during his absence, wondering how he will kick them out. The young man, in addition, is a fool, and therefore

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meets with the greater success. And sometimes I envy his lack of brains more than his beauty. The Scriptural declaration concerning the poor in spirit is incomplete: the kingdom of heaven may be theirs, — that may be true or not, and I care not a fig which it is, — but undoubtedly theirs is the kingdom of this world; they have money and beautiful women, the only two things worth desiring on earth. Are you acquainted with a single clever man who is rich as well, or a loyal and meritorious fellow who has a passably good-looking mistress? Beautiful as Theodore is, I have nevertheless not coveted his beauty, and I had rather he had it than I.

Those strange loves of which the elegies of the poets of antiquity are full, and which caused us so much surprise and wonderment, are therefore likely and possible. When we translated those passages we substituted women's names for those we found in them. Juventius became Juventia, Alexis changed into Ianthe. The handsome lads became lovely maidens, and thus did we make over the monstrous seraglios of Catullus, Tibullus, Martial, and gentle Vergil. It was a very charming occupation, which merely proved how little we had penetrated the genius of antiquity.

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I am a man of the time of Homer; the world in which I live is not mine, and I am not in touch with the society around me. Christ did not come for me; I am as much of a pagan as Alcibiades or Phidias. I have never gathered on Golgotha the flowers of the Passion, and the deep stream that flows from the open side of the Crucified One, girdling the world with blood, has not laved me; my rebellious body refuses to acknowledge the supremacy of the soul, and my flesh will not submit to be mortified. I think earth as fair as heaven, and virtue, to me, lies in the beauty of form. I care nothing for spirituality; I prefer a statue to a phantasm, and high noon to twilight. Three things delight me: gold, marble, and purple; brilliancy, solidity, and colour. Of these are my dreams made, and of these materials are built all the palaces I erect for my fancies. At times other dreams come to me — long trains of white horses, without harness or bridle, ridden by handsome naked young men who file past on a dark-blue background as on the frieze of the Parthenon, or lines of maidens crowned with bands, with tunics falling in straight folds, and ivory timbrels, who seem to be winding round an immense vase. Never any mist or vapour, never anything undefined or vague. There are

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no clouds in my heaven, or if there be they are solid, chiselled clouds, made out of the marble splinters fallen from the statue of Jove. The sharp, clear-cut outlines of mountains break the sky line, and the sun, resting on one of the highest crests, opens wide its yellow lion's eye with the golden lids. The cicada chirps and sings; the ripe corn crackles; the shadow, defeated and overborne by the heat, draws together and creeps in to the foot of the trees: all blazes with light, shines again, is splendidly luminous. The least detail becomes marked and stands out boldly; every object takes on robust shape and colour. There is no room there for the sappiness and dreaminess of Christian art. *That* is my world. In my landscapes the brooks flow in carved waves from a sculptured urn, and, amid the tall, green, sounding reeds, that recall the Eurotas, are seen the round, white hips of some naiad with glaucous hair. Diana passes through the dark oak forest, quiver on back, scarf flying in the wind, and buskins cross-laced. She is followed by her hounds and her harmoniously named nymphs. My pictures are painted in four tones, like those of the primitive masters, and often are only coloured *bassi-relievi*, for I love to touch with the finger what I have seen, and to follow the roundness of a con-

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tour even in its slightest parts; I look at each thing from every point of view, and turn around it with a light in my hand. I have looked at love with the light of antiquity and as a more or less perfect piece of sculpture. What is the arm like? Fair. The hands are delicately shaped. What think you of this foot? I think the ankle lacks distinction and the heel is commonplace. But the breasts are well placed and shapely, the serpentine line undulates satisfactorily, the shoulders are plump and well formed. That woman would make a passable model, and several bits of her would be worth making moulds from. Let us love her.

That has always been the way with me. I look on women with the eye of the sculptor, not of the lover. All my life I have been deeply concerned with the shape of the flagon, never with the quality of its contents. Had Pandora's box been in my hands I believe I would not have opened it. I said a moment ago that Christ had not come for me; neither did Mary, the Star of the modern heaven, the gentle Mother of the glorious Child.

I have often stopped long under the stone foliage of the cathedrals, by the dim light of the stained-glass windows, at the time when the organ moaned of itself,

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when an invisible finger lighted upon the keys and the wind blew in the pipes, and I have looked deep into the great pale-blue eyes of the Madonna. I have piously followed with my glance the emaciated oval of her face, the faint curve of her brows; I have admired her smooth, luminous forehead, her chastely transparent temples, her cheeks of sober and maidenly bloom softer than peach-blossom; I have counted each of the beautiful golden eyelashes which cast a quivering shadow; I have made out, in the half-light in which she is bathed, the vanishing lines of her delicate neck so modestly bent. Well, I must confess it, all that immaterial beauty, so airy, so vaporous that one feels it is about to vanish, moved me but little. I very greatly prefer Venus Anadyomene, — very greatly. The antique eyes drawn up at the corners, the lips so clean-cut and perfectly shaped, so amorous and so inviting to the kiss, the low, full forehead, the hair wavy as the sea and carelessly knotted behind the head, the smooth, shining shoulders, the back with its innumerable delightful curves, the small breasts, not too prominent, the rounded, even contours, the breadth of hip, the delicate strength, the mark of superhuman vigour in so adorably feminine a body,

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— ravish and delight me to a degree you, the Christian and the sage, cannot have any idea of.

In spite of her affected air of humility, Mary is much too proud for me. Scarcely does the tip of her foot, wound round with linen bandages, touch the already paling globe on which writhes the ancient dragon. She has the loveliest eyes in the world, but they are always turned heavenwards or else cast down; never do they look straight at you — never has a human form been mirrored in them. Then I dislike the nimbus of smiling cherubs that are circled round her head in a golden haze. I am jealous of those tall young angels with floating hair and robes who press so amorously round her in her Assumptions; the hands which interlace in order to bear her up, the wings that flutter to fan her are unpleasant and annoying to me. These heavenly fops, so trig and triumphant, with their tunics of light, their wigs of golden threads, with their fine blue and green feathers, strike me as much too gallant.

Venus rises from the sea to enter the world, nude and alone, as beseems a deity who loves man. She prefers earth to Olympus, and has more men than gods for lovers. She does not wrap herself up in the veils of mysticism, but stands upright, her dolphin behind her,

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and her foot upon a pearly shell; the sun's beams strike upon her polished waist, and her fair hand holds up the waves of her lovely hair in which Father Ocean has scattered his finest pearls. She is fully visible; she conceals nothing, for modesty is intended for the ugly alone, being a modern invention, sprung from the Christian contempt of form and matter.

O thou world of old, so all thou didst revere is now contemned; thine idols cast down in the dust; thy gods, so fair, so charming, displaced from their pedestals by emaciated anchorites in rags, and by blood-covered martyrs with shoulders torn by the wild beasts of thy circuses. Christ has wrapped the whole world in his shroud. Beauty has to blush at herself and take to a shroud too. Resume your tunics and your chlamydæ, handsome young men whose limbs are lustrous with oil and who wrestled in the lyceum or the gymnasium, under the splendid heavens, in the glorious sunshine of Attica, in the presence of the delighted crowd, and you, ye maidens of Sparta, that danced the bibasis and ran naked to the summit of Taygetus — for your reign is past. You too, who wrought the marble, and Prometheus-like gave life to bronze, break your chisels — there are to be no more sculptors. The tangible world

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is dead. A dark and gloomy thought alone fills the vast void. Cleomene visits the weavers to note the folds of cloth and linen.

Virginity, thou bitter plant, sprung from a soil soaked with blood, thou whose puny, sickly flower scarce manages to bloom in the damp shades of the cloister under the cold lustral rain, thou scentless and thorny rose, thou hast taken the place of the beauteous, joyous roses bathed in spikenard and Falernian of the dancers of Sybaris!

Thou wert unknown to the ancient world, thou barren flower; never did it twine thee in its garlands of flowers that subtly intoxicated. In that vigorous, healthy world thou wouldst have been disdainfully trampled under foot. Virginity, mysticism, melancholy, — three unknown words, three diseases brought in by the Christ. You could never have set foot on that earth so full of indulgent and playful deities, ye pale spectres that flood our world with your icy tears, and that, leaning on a cloud, one hand in your breast, utter but the single words, "O Death! O Death!"

I look upon woman, as the ancients did, as a beautiful slave intended for our pleasure. Christianity has not rehabilitated her in my eyes. She remains, to me,

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always a dissimilar, inferior thing which we adore and trifle with, a toy more intelligent than one of gold or silver and which gets up of itself if you let it fall. Because of this I have been told that I think ill of women, while I am of opinion, on the contrary, that I think very well of them.

I really cannot understand why women are so anxious to be looked upon as men. I can understand that one should wish to be a boa-constrictor, a lion, or an elephant, but that any one should wish to be a man passes my comprehension. Had I been present at the Council of Trent when the important question whether a woman is a man was being debated, I should assuredly have voted in the negative.

In the course of my life I have written a few love verses, or at least verses that claimed to be such. I have just re-read some; they are totally devoid of the feeling of modern love. If they were written in Latin distichs instead of French rimes, they might be mistaken for the work of an Augustan poetaster. And I wonder that the women for whom they were written were not angered outright by them, instead of being greatly pleased. It is true that women understand poetry about as well as do cabbages and roses — and

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naturally enough, for they are themselves poetry, or at least the best poetical instruments. A flute neither hears nor understands the air which is played upon it.

In the aforesaid verses I have sung only of the golden or dusky hair, of the wondrous smoothness of the skin, of the rounded arms, of the small feet, and the exquisite modelling of the hands; and the poem ends with a humble request that the divinity addressed will speedily grant me the enjoyment of all these fine things. In the most brilliant passages there are nothing but wreaths hung at her door, showers of flowers, perfumes burned, Catullian additions of kisses, delightful sleepless nights, quarrels with Aurora, followed by injunctions to the said Aurora to go back and hide herself behind old Tithonus's saffron-coloured curtains — it is cold brilliancy, vibrationless sonority. The work is accurate, polished, wrought with even niceness, but through all the refinements and veils of the expression, the short, sharp voice of the master trying to soften itself as he addresses the slave is heard. It is not, as in the erotic poetry written since the Christian era, a soul beseeching another soul to love it because it loves; it is not a blue, smiling lake inviting a brook to mingle

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with it and with it reflect the stars in heaven; it is not a pair of turtle doves spreading their wings together to fly to the same nest, but Cynthia, you are fair to look upon; hasten, then, for who knows whether you will see the morrow. Your hair is blacker than the lustrous skin of an Ethiopian maid; therefore delay not, for in a few years silver threads will begin to show in your luxuriant locks; these roses are sweet-scented to-day, to-morrow they will give out a death stench and be but the dead forms of roses. Let us breathe in your roses as long as they resemble your cheeks; let me kiss your cheeks until they resemble roses. When you are old, Cynthia, no one will care to have you, not even the lictor's valets would have you for pay, and you will run after me whom now you disdain. Wait until Saturn's nail has wrinkled your clear, shining brow, and you will see your threshold — now so full of suppliants, so besieged, so wetted with hot tears, so covered with flowers — avoided, cursed, overgrown with grass and brambles. Hasten then, Cynthia, for the least wrinkle may kill the strongest love."

The elegy of the ancients is summed up in that brutal and imperious formula: it always ends in this, its most excellent reason, its strongest, most Achillean

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argument. It has little or nothing to say beyond this, and once it has promised a robe of byssus and a girdle of pearls of even size, it is done. And it is, after all, the best I too can find in similar circumstances. Not that I always keep to that rather meagre programme; I do embroider my narrow canvas with a few silken threads of different shades snatched here and there, but the threads are short or knotted together a score of times and hardly cling to the woof. I speak rather well on the subject of love because I have read many fine things about it. An actor's skill is all that is required, and with many women this seeming suffices. My habit of writing and imagining enables me to talk at length on the subject, and any fairly practised mind may, with application, easily obtain the same result. But I do not feel a single word I say, and I murmur, like the poet of antiquity, "Hasten, then, Cynthia."

I have often been charged with falsehood and hypocrisy, yet there lives not the man who would more gladly than I speak truthfully and lay bare his heart; but as I have not one idea, one feeling in common with the people who surround me, as the very first word I should speak truthfully would cause a general

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hue and cry, I have preferred to keep silent, or, if I do speak, to utter only stupid commonplaces which everyone has agreed to believe in. A pretty reception I should get if I were to tell the ladies what I have just written you! I fancy they would not greatly approve my point of view and my way of looking upon love. As for men, I cannot go and say plump out to them, either, that they are wrong not to crawl on all-fours, though that is exactly my highest opinion of them. I do not care to have a quarrel picked with me about every word I utter, for after all what matters it what I think or do not think, whether I am sad when I look gay, happy when I seem melancholy? No one objects to my not going about naked; may I not dress up my face as I dress up my body? Why should a mask be more reprehensible than a pair of breeches, — a lie than a pair of stays?

Alas! the earth spins round the sun, and one side of it is burning hot and the other icy cold. A battle is fought in which six hundred thousand men hack each other to pieces; the weather is most lovely; the flowers are amazingly coquettish, they unblushingly expose their rich bosoms under the very hoofs of the chargers. To-day innumerable good deeds have been

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done, and it is pouring rain, snowing, thundering, lightening, hailing — you would think the world was coming to an end. The benefactors of humanity are up to their eyes in mud and as dirty as curs, unless they can afford to keep a carriage. Creation jeers pitilessly at the creature and constantly launches the bitterest sarcasms at it. Everything is indifferent to everything else, and lives or vegetates in accordance with its own particular law. What do the sun, beet-roots, or men, even, care whether I do one thing or another, whether I live or die, whether I am happy or wretched, true or false? A bit of straw falls on an ant and breaks its third leg at the second joint; a cliff crashes down upon a village and destroys it: I do not believe the golden-eyed stars weep any more over the one than over the other of these catastrophes. You are my dearest friend, assuming that that word is not merely a hollow deception; suppose I were to die, it is plain that, however deeply grieved you might be, you would not go without your dinner even two days running, and that, notwithstanding the awful disaster, you would go on playing backgammon very pleasantly. What friend, what mistress of mine would, twenty years hence, remember my family and my Christian

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names, or know me in the street if I happened to go along with a coat out at the elbows? Forgetfulness and nothingness — there is man for you.

I feel as absolutely alone as it is possible to be, and all the threads which bound me to things and bound things to me have snapped, one after another. There are few instances of a man who, having preserved a knowledge of the motions within himself, has reached such a point of brutishness. I am like those flasks of wine which have been left uncorked, and from which the spirits have been completely evaporated. The liquor retains its appearance and colour, but when tasted it is insipid as water.

The rapidity of this process of decay terrifies me when I reflect upon it. If it keeps on at its present rate I shall have to be pickled, or I shall infallibly rot and the worms will attack me, for I no longer possess a soul, and the possession of the soul is the only difference between a living body and a dead one. It is not more than a twelvemonth since I still had something of human about me; I was excited, I looked around; I had a favourite thought, a sort of aim, an ideal; I wished to be loved; I dreamed the dreams of my age, though, to be sure, they were more distinct and less

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chaste than those of ordinary youths, but nevertheless kept within due bounds. Little by little what there was in me of spiritual became detached and vanished, and there was nothing left but a thick deposit of ugly slime. The dream turned into a nightmare, the chimera into an incubus; the ivory gates of the spiritual world were closed to me. Now I cannot understand what I cannot handle; my dreams are earthy; everything condenses and hardens around me; nothing floats or wavers any more; all is airless, breathless; matter presses in upon me, enters into me, crushes me. I am like a pilgrim who has fallen asleep on a summer's day with his feet in the water, and who awakens on a winter's day with his legs caught and encased in ice. I no longer wish to be friend or lover to any one; glory itself, that dazzling halo which I had so coveted for my brows, does not excite the least desire in me. Alas! there is but one thing alive in me — the horrible desire which attracts me to Theodore. To this have come all my notions of morality: what is physically beautiful is good; what is ugly is evil. If I were to see a beautiful woman whom I should know to be the greatest scoundrel on earth, an adulteress and a poisoner, I confess I should not care a straw, and it would not

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prevent my taking my pleasure with her provided the shape of her nose satisfied me.

Here is my idea of supreme happiness: a large square building, windowless on its outer faces; a great court surrounded by a colonnade of white marble; in the centre a crystal-clear fountain with a quicksilver-like jet in the Arab fashion; orange and pomegranate trees in boxes alternating with one another, and over all a very blue sky and a very brilliant sun. Here and there great sharp-nosed greyhounds asleep; from time to time barefooted negroes, with golden anklets, and handsome, lissome, white-skinned maids dressed in rich and fanciful garments passing between the open arcades, a basket on their arm or an amphora on their head. Myself — motionless and silent under a magnificent dais, with piles of squares of carpet around me, a huge lion for an elbow-rest, and the bare bosom of a young slave for a footstool, — smoking opium in a big jade-stone pipe.

That is my idea of heaven, and if God is good enough to want me to go there after my death, he will have a little kiosk built for me in some corner on the above plan. Paradise as usually described strikes me as much too musical, and I humbly confess my

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inability to bear up under a sonata, even if it last only ten thousand years.

Now you know what is my El Dorado, my Promised Land, — a dream like unto any other dream, but having this peculiarity, that never do I introduce into it any known face; that not a single one of my friends has ever crossed the threshold of that imaginary palace; that none of the women I have possessed have ever sat down beside me there on the velvet cushions; I am alone in it amid ghosts. It has never once occurred to me to love any of the women, any of the dainty, shadowy maidens with whom I people it, nor have I ever fancied that any one of them was in love with me. In the seraglio of my fancy I have no favourite sultana. There are negresses and mulatto women, blue-skinned and red-haired Jewesses, Greek and Circassian, Spanish and English beauties, but they are only symbols of colour and form to me, and I have them just as one has all sorts of wines in one's cellar and all sorts of humming-birds in one's collection. They are instruments of pleasure, pictures that need no frame, statues that come to you when you call them and you desire to view them from a nearer point. A woman possesses an undoubted advantage over a statue; she turns of

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herself in the direction you desire, while with a statue you have to walk round it to get the right point of view, and that is tiring.

You readily perceive that, holding such views, it is impossible for me to remain in this age or in this world; for it is out of the question to exist thus outside of time and space. I must find something else.

Such a train of thought leads naturally and logically to this conclusion. Because one seeks only to satisfy the eye with the beauty of form and the perfection of outline, one welcomes them wherever found. And thus are explained the curious aberrations of love in antiquity.

Since the days of Christ there has not been produced a single statue of a man in which the beauty of adolescence is idealised and reproduced with the carefulness characteristic of the sculptors of antiquity. Woman has become the type of moral and physical beauty; man really fell from his high estate on the day the Child was born in Bethlehem. Woman is creation's queen; the stars form a crown for her head; the crescent of the moon glories in the fact that it curves beneath her feet, the sun yields its purest gold to make gems for her, the painters who wish to flatter

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angels give them women's faces, and I assuredly do not blame them for doing so. But it was quite otherwise before the coming of the gentle and gallant teller of parables; if a god or a hero was to be made attractive, he was not womanised; gods and heroes alike had a type of their own, at once vigorous and delicate, but always virile, however tender their contours, however polished and lacking in muscles and veins the workman had made their divine legs and arms. The special character of feminine beauty was rather brought to conform with this type; the shoulders were broadened, the hips narrowed, the chest was more ample, the joints of the arms and thighs stood out more strongly. There is not much difference between Paris and Helen, and for this reason Hermaphrodite was one of the chimeras most ardently caressed by idolatrous antiquity.

And in sooth the son of Hermes and Aphrodite is one of the most graceful creations of the genius of antiquity. It is impossible to imagine anything more exquisite than these two perfect forms, mingling harmoniously one with the other, these two beauties, so equal and so different, which make but one superior to both individually, because they temper and set off

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each other. Can there be any more delightful indecision, to the exclusive admirer of form, than that caused by the sight of that back, of those strange loins, of those legs at once so delicate and so strong that one hesitates to say whether they belong to Mercury about to take his flight or to Diana issuing from the bath? The torso is a composite of the most delectable monstrosities: on the plump, full bosom of the youth swell with strange grace a maiden's breasts. Under the rounded waist, thoroughly feminine in its softness, one readily guesses the presence of the angles and the ribs of a youth's waist; the stomach is somewhat flattened for a woman's, somewhat too rounded for a man's, and the whole appearance of the body has something vague and undecided which it is impossible to express, and which is peculiarly attractive. Theodore would undoubtedly be an excellent model of this type of beauty; yet I am of opinion that in him the feminine side is the stronger, and that he is nearer to Salmacis than to the Hermaphrodite of the "Metamorphoses."

The curious thing is that I scarcely ever think of his sex now, and that I love him with a feeling of perfect security. Sometimes I endeavour to persuade

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myself that this love is abominable, and I repeat it to myself in the strongest terms; but the remonstrance is but empty sound; it is but a reasoning I indulge in and do not feel the force of. Loving him seems to me the most natural thing in the world, and what any one else would do in my place.

I watch him, I hear him play or sing, for he is a delightful singer, and I enjoy all this wondrously. So much does he impress me as being a woman that one day, in the excitement of conversation, I happened to call him madam, whereupon he broke into what struck me as a rather forced laugh.

But suppose he is a woman, what is the reason which has led him to assume this disguise? I cannot fathom it, try as I may. I can readily understand that a very young, very handsome and quite beardless gentleman should disguise himself as a woman, for many a door that would otherwise be fast closed is opened to him, and the false seeming may lead him into the most labyrinthine and amusing complication of adventures. It is a way of reaching a woman who is closely guarded, or of forcing a success thanks to the surprise. But I do not see what benefit can accrue to a young and beautiful woman who roams the country

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round in men's habiliments; she is bound to be a loser by it. A woman ought not to give up in that way the pleasure of being courted, sung in madrigals and worshipped; she would rather give up life itself, and she would be quite right, for what is woman's life worth if these be wanting? It is nothingness — nay, it is worse than death. The fact that women who have reached their thirtieth year or who have had small-pox do not throw themselves down from the top of a steeple has always excited the greatest wonder in me.

All the same, something more powerful than all these reasons calls out to me that Theodore is a woman, the woman of my dreams, the woman I am to love exclusively, and who will love no man but me. Yes, it is she, the eagle-eyed goddess with the fair regal hands, who smiled condescendingly on me from her cloud-throne. She has come to me in this disguise to try me; to see whether I would recognise her, whether my love-glance would penetrate through the veils in which she has wrapped herself, as in those fairy tales in which your fairy first shows up as a beggar-maid, then suddenly draws herself up splendidly adorned with gold and jewels.

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But I did know you, O my love! At sight of you my heart leaped up within me as did the child John in Saint Elizabeth's womb when the Virgin visited her. Flame filled the air, and the smell of divine ambrosia; I saw at your feet the trail of fire, and I knew at once you were no ordinary mortal.

The melodious sounds of Saint Cecilia's viola that the angels listen to with rapture are harsh and discordant compared with the pearly cadences that issue from your ruby lips; the young and smiling Graces tread an unending measure around you; when you pass through the woodland the warbling birds bend their crested heads, the better to see you, and break into their loveliest song. The amorous moon rises earlier to kiss you with her pale, silvery lips, for she has forsaken Endymion for you; the wind refrains from effacing the delicate imprint of your adorable feet; when you bend over the spring, the water becomes smoother than crystal lest it wrinkle and deform the reflection of your heavenly features; the modest violets themselves open out their little hearts to you and coquette before you; the jealous strawberry is filled with emulation and strives to equal the divine crimson of your lips; the imperceptible midge joyously buzzes and applauds

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you with the beating of its wings — all Nature loves and admires you, for you are Nature's fairest work!

At last I live! Until now I was but a dead man; now I have cast off my shroud and from the grave I uplift to the sun my two thin hands; my earthy, spectral hue is gone; my blood flows swiftly in my veins. At last the frightful silence that reigned around me is broken, and the dark opaque vault that pressed down on my head is illumined. Innumerable mysterious voices whisper in my ear; exquisite stars sparkle above me and scatter on my winding path spangles of gold; the daisies smile sweetly on me and the blue bells whisper my name with their little twisted tongues. I understand many a thing I had never understood; I discover amazing affinities and sympathies; I comprehend the language of the rose and the nightingale, and as I run I read the book I could not even spell out. In the respectable old oak, covered with mistletoe and parasitic plants, I find I had an old friend, and that the languorous and frail periwinkle, whose great blue eye ever overflows with tears, has long nourished a discreet and restrained love for me. Love, love it is that has struck the scales from mine eyes and given me the solution of the riddle. Love descended into

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the depths of the dungeon wherein languished my crouching, sleepy soul; it took it by the hand and made it climb the steep and narrow stair that led to the outside air. All the doors were burst open and for the first time that poor Psyche emerged from the Me in which it had been imprisoned.

Another life has become mine. I breathe through another, and should a thrust wound her it would kill me. Before this happy day I was like those gloomy Japanese idols that ever gaze upon their belly. I watched myself; I was the audience that sat at the play I was performing; I observed myself live, and listened to the beat of my heart as to the ticking of a clock. That was all. Images touched my careless eyes; sounds fell upon my heedless ear, but naught of the outer world reached my soul. No one's life was necessary to me; I even doubted if any one but myself existed, and was not very sure that I did. I seemed to stand alone in the universe and all the rest appeared to be but a vapour and images, empty illusions and fleeting apparitions destined to people this nothingness. But now, what a difference!

Yet what if my presentiment deceives me, and Theodore be really a man, as every one believes him to be!

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Such marvellous beauty is not unexampled; and great youth sometimes aids the illusion. I will not allow my thoughts to dwell on this possibility; it would drive me mad. The seed that fell on the sterile rock of my heart but yesterday has already sent its numberless filaments into it in every direction; it clings firmly to it, and it would be impossible to drag it out. It is already a tree with its bloom and leaves, its strong twisting roots. Were I to learn to a certainty that Theodore is not a woman, I know not, alas! whether I should not still love him.

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MY lovely friend, you were indeed right to oppose my project to see men and to study them thoroughly before giving my heart to any one of them. I have forever destroyed in myself, not love only, but the very possibility of being in love.

We girls are to be pitied, brought up as we are with so much care and so modestly surrounded with a triple wall of precautions and reticence; we who are not permitted to hear or suspect anything, and whose chief knowledge is that we do not know anything. In what strange error do we live, and how treacherous are the illusions which cradle us in their arms!

Ah! Graciosa, thrice accursed be the instant when I bethought myself of this disguise. What abominable, infamous, coarse things have I been compelled to witness or listen to! What a wealth of chaste and priceless ignorance I have spent in a brief time!

It was on a lovely moonlight night, do you remember? We were strolling together at the very end of the garden, in that dull and lonesome walk at one end

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of which stands the statue of the flute-playing Faun, whose nose is gone and whose whole body is covered with a thick coat of blackish moss, while at the other end there is an artificial landscape sketched on the wall and half effaced by the rains. Through the yet young foliage of the shrubbery we could see here and there the glint of the stars and the silvery curve of the crescent moon. The scent of young shoots and growing plants was wafted to us from the flower-garden on the faint breath of a gentle air. A bird, hidden somewhere, sang a strange, languorous air, and we, like true girls that we were, talked of love and lovers, of marriage, of the handsome cavalier we had seen at mass. We put together the little we knew of the world and of things in general; we turned over and over a remark overheard by chance, the meaning of which seemed obscure and strange to us; we put to each other an endless number of those absurd questions which innocence alone can suggest. Oh, what primitive poesy, what adorable nonsense there was in these furtive talks of two foolish little girls fresh from their convent school!

You wanted for a lover a bold, proud young man, with black hair and moustaches, great spurs, long feath-

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ers, a long sword, a sort of amorous swashbuckler, and you were full of the heroic and the triumphant, dreaming but of duels, escalades, and miraculous devotion. You would willingly have thrown your glove into the lion's den to have your Esplandianus fetch it out again, and it was comical to hear the fair-haired, blushing, yielding little maiden you were then spout these brave tirades at a breath and with the most martial air.

For me, though but six months older, I was less romantic by six years. What I chiefly desired to know was what men said to each other and what they did when they had left the drawing-room or the theatre. I felt that there was many a defective and obscure side to their life, kept carefully concealed from us, and with which it was important that we should be acquainted. Sometimes, concealed behind a curtain, I watched from a distance the gentlemen who came to our house, and I fancied I then detected in their ways something ignoble and cynical, a coarse carelessness or a brutal preoccupation, which I failed to find as soon as they entered and which they seemed to throw off in some magical way on the threshold of the room. Every one, young and old, appeared to have

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uniformly adopted a conventional mask, conventional sentiments, and conventional speech when they were with women. From the corner of the drawing-room in which I sat up straight as a doll, without leaning back in my arm-chair, and while I turned my bouquet in my hands, I looked and listened, keeping my eyes cast down nevertheless, but seeing everything on the right and the left, before and behind me. My glance, like the fabled glance of the lynx, pierced the walls, and I could have told what was going on in the next room.

I had also remarked a notable difference in the way married women were spoken to. In place of the discreet, polite, frivolously pretty speeches addressed to me and my companions, I noted freer playfulness, less reserved, bolder ways, a reticence easily interpreted, and turns coming quickly to the point, — all indicative of a corruption that knew well it was dealing with corruption like unto itself. I felt unmistakably that there was something in common between them and not between us, and I would have given anything to know what it was.

Eagerly and with furious curiosity I followed with eye and ear the buzzing, laughing groups of young

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men who, after having stopped at some point of the circle of visitors, resumed their walk talking and casting ambiguous glances as they passed. On their lips disdainfully puffed out, fluttered incredulous sneers; they seemed to mock at what they had just said and to take back the compliments and the adulation they had just showered upon us. I could not hear their words, but I understood by the motion of their lips that they were speaking words of a language unknown to me, and which no one had ever made use of in my presence. The very ones who seemed the most humble and submissive lifted their heads with an unmistakable air of revolt and weariness; a sigh of relief, like that of an actor who has got to the end of a long tirade, escaped them in spite of themselves, and as they left us they spun round on their heels in a quick, hurried way which denoted a sort of internal satisfaction at being freed from the burdensome task of being decent and polite.

I would have given a year of my life to hear, unseen, their talk for an hour. I often made out from certain attitudes, from gestures half concealed, from side glances, that I was the subject of conversation and that my age or my face was being discussed.

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Then I was on hot coals; the few muttered words, the bits of sentences which at times reached me excited my curiosity in the highest degree without satisfying it, and threw me into the strangest uncertainty and perplexity.

What was being said generally appeared to be favorable to me, but this did not trouble me one way or the other. I cared little enough whether I was thought handsome or not, but the stray whispered remarks, almost always followed up by a long snigger and curious winks — what these meant was what I should have liked to know. To hear plainly one of these speeches spoken low behind a curtain or by a door corner, I would have given up without regret the most flowery and perfumed conversation in the world.

If I had had a lover, I should have greatly desired to know how he spoke of me to another man, and in what language he would have boasted of his success to his companions in debauch, once he was a little bit intoxicated and leant on his elbows on the table.

Now I know it, and right sorry am I to know it. That is always the way.

It was a crazy notion of mine, but what is done is done, and one cannot forget what one has learned. I

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did not listen to you, dear Graciosa, and I am very sorry for it; but we do not always heed reason, especially when it speaks with such a pretty mouth as yours, for, I know not why, we cannot think a piece of advice sound unless it is given by some old grey-beard, — just as if sixty years of stupidity made one clever.

But all this business worried me overmuch and I could not stand it longer; I was burning with desire to know. The fatal apple was growing riper in the foliage above my head, and I was bound to have a bite out of it, even if I had to throw it away afterwards should it prove to be bitter.

I have done as did my very dear grandmother Eve: I have had a bite.

The death of my uncle, my only remaining relative, leaving me free to act as I pleased, I carried out my long cherished dream. I had taken the greatest precautions to prevent any one suspecting my sex. I had learned to use sword and pistol; I was a perfect rider, and a bolder one than most men; I applied myself to wearing my cloak with the proper set and switching my riding-whip in the correct way, and in the course of a few months I managed to transform a rather pretty

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girl into a much handsomer young gentleman, who lacked scarce anything but a moustache. I turned my possessions into cash and left the city, resolved to return to it only when I should have acquired the fullest experience of men.

That was the only way to clear up my doubts; to have had lovers would not have taught me anything, or at least would have but partially informed me. What I wanted was to study man thoroughly, to dissect him in the minutest detail with an inexorable knife, and to have him living and quivering on my operating-table. To do this, it was necessary to see him alone in his home, in his free and easy ways, to follow him on his walks, into the pot-houses, and elsewhere. Thanks to my disguise, I could go everywhere without being noticed; nothing was concealed from me; all reserve, all constraint vanished; I was made the depositary of confidences and myself made imaginary ones to call out true ones. Alas! women have read the romance of man, never his history.

It is awful to think, but we never do think, how profoundly ignorant we are of the life and conduct of the men who appear to love us and whom we shall marry by and by. Their real life is as thoroughly un-

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known to us as if they were inhabitants of Saturn or any other planet hundreds of millions of miles from this sub-lunar world of ours; they seem to belong to another species; there is not the least intellectual bond between the two sexes; virtues in the one are vices in the other, and men are admired for doing what causes women to be ostracised.

The life of us girls, on the contrary, is perfectly plain and may be seen at a glance. It is quite easy to follow us from the home to the boarding-school, and back from the boarding-school to the home. What we do is patent to every one; for all may see our wretched stump-drawings; our bouquets in water-colours, composed of a rose the size of a cabbage, and of a pansy, the stems tastefully tied with a ribbon of tender hue; the slippers we embroider for father's birthday, or grandfather's, have nothing occult or suspicious about them. We perform our sonatas and our romances with the most desirable coldness. We are duly and carefully tied to our mother's apron-strings, and at nine or ten o'clock at latest we get back into our dear little white beds, in our clean and discreet little rooms, into which we are virtuously bolted and padlocked until the following morning. The liveliest, the most jealous

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susceptibility could find nothing to object to in all this. The most transparent of crystal is not as transparent as such a life.

Whoever takes us knows what we have been doing from the moment we were weaned, and even before, if he choose to carry his researches so far. We do not live, we vegetate like moss and flowers; the icy shadow of the maternal stem falls ever upon us, poor, repressed rosebuds that dare not open. Our main business is to sit up straight, with stays laced tight, with eyes properly cast down, and to be more motionless and stiff than lay figures and squeaking dolls.

We are forbidden to speak first, to take any part in conversation save to answer "yes" or "no," if we are asked a question. As soon as something interesting is to be said we are sent off to practise the harp or the piano, and our music-teachers are all sixty years old at least and take snuff to excess. The models hung in our rooms are most vague and elusive in their anatomy. The gods of Greece, when they are to enter a young ladies' boarding-school, take care first to purchase at some second-hand clothier's very full overcoats and to have their portraits engraved in mezzotint, which makes them look like janitors

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or hackney cabmen, and does not conduce to inflame our imagination.

By dint of guarding against our becoming romanesque, they make idiots of us. The time of our education is spent, not in teaching us something, but in preventing our learning something.

We are really prisoners, body and soul. But a young man, master of his actions, who goes out in the morning not to come back before next day, who has money, who can earn it and do with it what he pleases, how could he justify the employment of his time? What man is there who would tell his love all he did during the day and during the night? There is not one, not even among those who are reputed to be purest.

I had sent my horse and clothes to a small farmhouse I own not far from the town. I dressed, sprang into the saddle, and off I went, not without a curious sinking of the heart. I regretted nothing, I left no one behind, — neither relatives nor friends, neither cat nor dog, — and yet I was sad and tears almost came to my eyes. The farmhouse itself which I had visited but five or six times was nothing in particular to me, and I did not feel for it that attachment we feel for certain

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places, and which causes emotion in us when we have to leave them; yet I turned round two or three times to watch once more from afar the blue spiral of smoke that rose from it through the trees.

It was in that house that I had left my woman's name, together with my gowns and petticoats. In the room where I had changed my dress were put away twenty years of my life which no longer counted and no longer concerned me. Above the door might have been inscribed, "Here lies Magdalen de Maupin;" for, in truth, I was no longer Magdalen de Maupin, but Theodore de Sérannes, and henceforth no one would call me by the sweet name of Magdalen.

The drawer in which were put away my gowns, henceforth useless, appeared to me as the grave of my fair illusions. I was a man, at least I looked a man; the girl was dead.

When I finally lost sight of the tops of the chestnut trees that surround the farmhouse, I seemed to be no longer myself, but some one else, and I recalled my former actions as if they were those of a stranger which I had beheld, or as the beginning of a novel I had not finished reading. I complacently recalled a thousand little details, the childish artlessness of which called to

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my lips a smile of indulgence, of mocking indulgence at times, like that of a young libertine listening to the Arcadian and pastoral confidences of a schoolboy; and at the very time at which I was parting from them forever, all the puerilities I had indulged in as a little girl and a maiden ran to the roadside making friendly signs to me and blowing kisses to me with their white taper fingers.

I spurred my horse to escape from these enervating emotions; the trees flashed rapidly by on the right and on the left, but the mad swarm, buzzing louder than a hive of bees, began to course down the side walks and call out to me, "Magdalen! Magdalen!"

A smart blow from my riding-whip caused my horse to double its speed. So rapid was my pace that my hair blew out almost straight behind me; my cloak assumed a horizontal line, and the folds of it looked as though they were carved in stone. Once I looked back and saw, a little white cloud far upon the horizon, the dust raised by my horse's hoofs.

I pulled up.

In a wild-rose bush, on the edge of the road, I saw something white moving, and a little clear, silvery, sweet voice struck on my ear,—

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"Magdalen, Magdalen, whither are you faring so far, Magdalen? I am your maidenhood, dear child, and therefore wear a white robe and a white wreath and am white-skinned. But why are you booted, Magdalen? My impression is you had a very pretty foot. Boots and trunk-hose on you, and a great beaver with a feather, like a cavalier bound for the wars! Why that long sword which slaps and bruises your leg? You are strangely got up, Magdalen, and I am not sure whether I ought to accompany you."

"Go back home if you are afraid, my dear; water my flowers and look after my doves. But really you would be wrong, for you will be safer under these garments cut out of stout cloth than under your own gauze and linen. My boots prevent my shapely feet being seen, the sword defends me, and the feather that waves in my hat is there to frighten away all the nightingales that might sing in my ear deceitful songs of love."

I proceeded on my way. In the sighing of the wind I seemed to recognise the last phrase of the sonata I had learned for my uncle's anniversary, and in a great rose which raised its full bloom above a low wall, the model of the big rose which I had so often drawn in water-colours; and as I passed in front of a house I

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saw floating at a window the ghosts of my own curtains. My whole past seemed to cling to me to try to prevent me from going on into a new future.

Two or three times I hesitated and turned my horse the other way, but the little blue adder of curiosity softly whispered insidious words and said to me: "Go on, go on, Theodore; this is a good opportunity to learn. If you do not do it this time, you never will. Are you going to give away that great heart of yours at haphazard, at the first seeming of honesty and passion? Men conceal very extraordinary secrets from us, Theodore."

And away I went again at a gallop.

Unquestionably it was my body, and not my mind that wore the trunk-hose; I experienced a certain uneasiness and, as it were, a shudder of fear at a dark place in the forest; a shot fired by a poacher nearly made me faint. Had it been a highwayman, I am sure the pistols in my holsters and my formidable sword would not have been of much service. But little by little I became hardened and never thought twice of such a matter.

The sun was slowly sinking on the horizon like the lamp of a theatre that is lowered at the close of the

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performance. Rabbits and pheasants crossed the road from time to time; the shadows lengthened and the distance was growing redder. Parts of the sky were of the palest and tenderest lilac, others citron and orange; the night-birds began to sing and many a strange noise arose from the wood; the little remaining light died out and the darkness became dense, rendered still more opaque by the shadow of the trees. And here was I, who had never gone out alone at night, all by myself in a great forest at eight in the evening! Can you fancy that, Graciosa? Can you believe it of me, who was scared to death at the end of the garden? Fear swayed me more than ever, my heart beat loud, and I own that it was with much satisfaction that I saw peep out and shine on the other side of a slope the lights of the town to which I was bound. As soon as I saw these brilliant dots, like stars on earth, my fear vanished completely. It was as though these indifferent lights were the open eyes of so many friends watching over me.

My horse was no less well-pleased than I, and, scenting a pleasant stable-smell, sweeter to him than the scent of daisies and wild strawberries, he made straight for the Red Lion inn.

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A golden light shone through the lead-encased windows of the inn, the tin sign of which swung to and fro, plaining like an old woman, for the breeze was beginning to freshen. I handed my horse over to an hostler and entered the kitchen.

A huge fireplace opening wide its red and black maw at the back, swallowed up a whole faggot at a time, and on either side of the andirons two dogs, seated on their rumps, and almost as big as a man, were cooking before the fire in the most phlegmatic way, merely lifting their paws and uttering a whimper when the heat became too intense; but they would undoubtedly have preferred to be done to a coal to drawing back a single step.

My in-coming did not seem to please them, and I vainly endeavoured to get acquainted with them by patting and stroking their heads time and again. They cast sidelong glances at me that boded no good; whereat I was astonished, for animals willingly come to me.

The host approached and asked me what I wished for supper. He was pot-bellied, red-nosed, green-eyed, and wore a smile that went clean round his head. At every word he spoke he exhibited a double row of sharp teeth, separated like those of ogres. The big

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kitchen-knife hanging at his side had a suspicious look and might be turned to various uses. When I had told him what I wanted, he went to one of the dogs and kicked it. The dog rose and entered a sort of wheel, with a piteous, suffering air, casting the while a reproachful glance at me. At last, seeing no respite was to be looked for, he began to turn the wheel in which he was shut up, and consequently the spit on which was stuck the chicken for my supper. I promised myself to let him have the bones for his trouble, and I began to note the appearance of the kitchen while waiting for the chicken to be cooked.

The ceiling was a network of great oak beams, browned and blackened by the smoke of the fire and of the candles. On the sideboards shone out of the shadow tin dishes more brilliant than silver, and white crockery-ware sprigged with blue. Along the walls lines of highly polished stewpans looked much like the bucklers hung in rows outside Greek or Roman triremes (forgive, Graciosa, the epic magnificence of this comparison). One or two stout kitchen wenches were busy around a long table, and were laying plates and forks, — a music more agreeable than any other when you are hungry, for the stomach then develops a keener

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sense of hearing than the ear itself. On the whole, spite of the gap-mouth and the wolf-teeth of the host, the appearance of the inn was honest and pleasant enough, and had the innkeeper's mouth been a yard wide and his teeth thrice as long and shining, the rain was by this time sluicing the windows and the wind howling in a way to destroy any thought of departure; for to my mind there is nothing more gloomy than the moaning of the wind on a dark and rainy night.

A thought which occurred to me made me smile; it was that no one would have dreamt of looking for me here. Who, indeed, would have fancied that little Magdalen, instead of being in her nice warm bed, her alabaster night-light near her, a novel under her pillow, and her maid in the next room ready to run in on the least night alarm, was rocking on a straw-bottomed chair in a country inn, sixty miles from home, her booted feet on the fender and her small hands cavalierly stuck in her pockets?

For Magdalen has not remained, like her companions, lazily leaning on her elbow on the balcony rail, between the morning glories and the jessamine that climb over the window, watching, at the other end of

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the plain, the violet fringes of the horizon or a rose-coloured cloudlet, rounded off by the May breeze. She has not hung mother-of-pearl palaces with lily leaves to make a home for her fancies; nor, like you, fair dreamers, invested some phantom figure with all imaginable perfections; she resolved to know men before giving herself to a man; she has left everything, her lovely, rich-coloured silk and velvet dresses, her necklaces and bracelets, her birds and her flowers; she has voluntarily renounced the worship of herself, the prostrations of lovers, the bouquets and the madrigals, the pleasure of being considered lovelier and better dressed than you, her sweet woman's-name, all that she was, in a word, and she has gone off alone, the brave girl that she is, to learn in the world itself the great science of life.

If people knew that, they would say I am crazy. You said it yourself, dear Graciosa; but the women who are really crazy are those who throw their soul to the winds and scatter their love at haphazard on rocks and stones without knowing whether a single grain will ever spring up.

O Graciosa, I have never thought without terror of the possibility of loving a man unworthy of my love,

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of baring my soul to impure eyes, of allowing a profane being to enter into the sanctuary of my heart, of letting for a time the clear waters of my love run side by side with muddy waters. However complete the separation, something of the slime remains and the brook never regains its pristine limpidity.

To think that a man has embraced you, touched you, seen your body, and may say, "She is this or that; she has such a mark at such a place; her soul is so and so; her dream is this or that; this makes her laugh, and that weep; I have in my pocket-book a feather from the wing of her fancy; this ring is made of her hair; thus did she caress me, and this was a usual expression of endearment with her"!

Ah! Cleopatra, I understand now why you caused to be slain, when morning came, the lover with whom you had spent the night. Sublime cruelty, which once I imprecated. How well you knew human nature, you queen among voluptuous women, and what depth of thought there was in your barbarity. No living man was to divulge the mystery of your bed; the love words spoken by your lips were not to be repeated. 'T was thus you preserved your illusion pure. Experience did not strip bit by bit the lovely phantom

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you had clasped in your arms. You preferred to be parted by one fell stroke of the axe than by long disgust. And rightly, for what a torture it is to find the chosen one prove every moment untrue to one's idea of him; to discover in his character a thousand pettinesses unsuspected heretofore; to perceive that what had seemed so fair when beheld through love's glass is really very ugly, and that the supposed hero of your novel is, after all, but a prosaic man who wears slippers and a dressing-gown.

I do not possess Cleopatra's power, and did I possess it, I should certainly not have the nerve to use it. So being both unable and unwilling to have my lovers decapitated on their leaving my couch, and also not being willing to bear with what other women bear, I must look twice to it before having a lover, and three or four times rather than twice, if the fancy for a lover takes me, which I rather doubt, after what I have seen and heard, unless I happen to meet in some blessed unknown land a heart kin to mine, as the novels have it, — a pure and virgin heart that has never yet loved, and which is capable of loving in the true meaning of the word. But that is no easy matter.

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Several gentlemen entered the inn; the darkness and storm had prevented their pursuing their journey. They were all young, the eldest being certainly not over thirty. Their dress showed them to belong to the upper classes, and if their dress had not done so, the insolent familiarity of their manners would have made it plain enough. One or two were interesting-looking; the rest all exhibited more or less plainly that sort of brutal joviality and careless good-fellowship which mark men among themselves and which they wholly lay aside when they are with us.

If they had by any chance suspected that the slim youth half asleep on a chair in the chimney corner was far from being what he seemed, but a young girl in reality, a choice morsel, as they say, their tone would have changed with startling suddenness. They would have swelled out and shown off; they would have drawn near with many a low bow, toes turned out, elbows squared, a smile in the glance, on the lips, nose, hair, in all the attitude of the body. They would have picked their words and spoken softly and fair; at my least movement they would have made as though they would turn into carpets before me, lest my delicate feet should be hurt by the unevenness of the

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floor; every hand would have been put out to assist me, and the softest seat placed in the cosiest corner; but I looked to be a pretty youth, not a pretty girl.

I confess that when I saw how little attention they bestowed on me I almost regretted my petticoats. For a moment, indeed, I felt quite mortified, as I happened to forget that I was in men's clothes, and I had to recollect the fact in order not to feel annoyed.

There was I, then, mute as a fish, my arms crossed, and apparently contemplating most attentively the chicken which was assuming a more and more golden-brown tint, and the wretched dog which I had so unseasonably disturbed and which was scrambling around in its wheel like several devils sprinkled with holy water.

The youngest member of the company came up and gave me a slap on the shoulder, which, my faith, hurt a good deal and drew from me an involuntary exclamation. He asked me if I would not rather sup with them than alone, as one drank better in company. I replied that I had not dared to hope for such a pleasure, and that I should be very glad to join them. Our places were laid side by side, and we sat down to table.

The breathless dog, after emptying a huge saucerful of water in three mouthfuls, resumed his place by the

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other dog, that had moved no more than a china dog would have done, — the new-comers, by special favour of Heaven, not having asked for roast chicken.

I learned from some remarks that escaped them that they were on their way to the court, which then lay at ——, and that they were to join others of their friends there. I told them that I was a young fellow of good family, fresh from the University, and that I was going to see some provincial relatives of mine, taking the regular schoolboys' road, that is, the longest way round. They laughed at this and, after a few remarks on my innocent and candid looks, asked me if I had a mistress. I replied that I did not know, whereupon they laughed more heartily than before. Bottle after bottle of wine was being rapidly emptied. Although I took care to keep my glass nearly always full, the wine had gone a little bit to my head, and not forgetting my object I so managed as to bring the talk round to the subject of women. Nor was it difficult to do so, for next to theology and æsthetics, it is of women that men best like to speak when they are tipsy.

My fellows were not drunk exactly, — they carried their liquor too well to be that, — but they were beginning to enter upon endless discussions of morals, and to lean

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unceremoniously upon the table. One of them had even put his arm round the spacious waist of one of the maids, and lolled his head very amorously. Another swore that he would forthwith burst, after the manner of a toad to which snuff has been given, if Janet did not let him kiss the two big red apples she called her cheeks. Janet, not wishing him to burst like a toad, graciously granted the desired favour, and did not even stay his hand when it boldly insinuated itself between the folds of her neckerchief into the warm vale of her bosom, which was but ill-defended by a little gold cross, and it was only after a brief conversation in a low voice that he allowed her to remove the dish.

And yet these were courtiers and well-bred men, and certainly, had I not seen it for myself, I would never have thought of charging them with taking such liberties with servant wenches. I dare say they had just left charming mistresses, to whom they had sworn the finest oaths in the world; indeed, I for one would never have dreamed of making my lover promise that he would not filthy, by contact with a scullion's cheeks, the lips which I had just pressed to mine.

The rascal seemed to greatly enjoy his kiss, to the full as much as if it had been given to Phyllis or

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Oriana. It was a smacking kiss, squarely and plumply planted, and which left on the lass's blazing cheek two little white marks, the trace of which she effaced with the back of the hand that had just been washing dishes. I do not believe that man had ever kissed the chaste goddess of his heart with so much natural tenderness, and apparently that thought occurred to him, for he murmured, with a disdainful turn of the elbow:

"The devil take thin women and fine sentiments!"

Which morality appeared to be to the taste of the company, for every one nodded approvingly.

"Upon my word," went on our friend, still pursuing his thought, "I am a most unlucky beggar. I must confide to you, gentlemen, under the seal of the strictest secrecy, that I who address you am at this moment indulging in a passion."

"Oh! oh!" said the others. "A passion! that is as bad as bad can be. What business have you with a passion?"

"She is an honest woman, gentlemen. Now, do not laugh, for why should I not have an honest woman? Did I say anything absurd? . . . Here, you, look out or I shall chuck the house at you, if you do not stop."

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"Well, go on."

"She is madly in love with me — is endowed with the loveliest soul; I am as great a connoisseur in souls as in horses, and I warrant you hers is of the first quality. She indulges in enthusiasm, ecstasy, devotion, sacrifice, refinement of tenderness, all that can be imagined of most transcendental; but she has no breasts to speak of, none at all indeed, any more than a girl of fifteen. Rather pretty for the rest, — small hand and small foot; too clever and not plump enough, and I feel like dropping her, for, devil take me, one does not care to go to bed with a spirit. I am very unhappy; pity me, dear friends."

And, moved to tears by the wine he had drunk, he began to weep copiously.

"Janet will console you for being unfortunate enough to have to sleep with a sylph," said his neighbour, as he poured him out a bumper. Her soul is so dense that it might be made into bodies for others, and she has flesh enough for three elephants."

O pure and noble woman, if you knew how the man you love most on earth, to whom you have sacrificed everything, talks about you in a pot-house, carelessly, to people whom he does not know. How shamelessly

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he strips you bare and exhibits you nude to the drunken gaze of his comrades, while you are yonder, leaning on your elbow, watching the road by which he will return!

Suppose some one had come and told you that, some twenty-four hours after leaving you, your lover would be courting a low wench, and arranging to spend the night with her, you would have affirmed that that was impossible, and you would have refused to credit it. You would scarce have believed your own ears and eyes; and yet it was true.

The mad and extravagant talk lasted some time longer, but through the comic exaggeration, the frequently filthy jokes, there showed a deep and genuine feeling of utter contempt for woman, and I learned more in that single evening than by the reading of twenty cartloads of the works of moralists.

The awful, the incredible things I heard brought to my face a look of sadness and severity, which the other guests perceived and on which they politely rallied me, but I could not bring back my gaiety. I had indeed suspected that men were different from what they appeared to be in our society, but I had not believed that they were so wholly unlike the mask they then wore, and my surprise equalled my disgust.

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If I wanted to cure forever a romantically inclined maiden, I should ask for no more than half an hour of a talk like the one I was listening to. It would be far more effectual than all a mother's remonstrances.

Some of the company boasted that they had just as many women as they pleased, and had but a word to say to seduce them; others exchanged recipes for the easy conquest of a mistress, or discussed the tactics to be followed when laying siege to a woman's virtue; others made sport of the women whose lovers they were, and proclaimed themselves the greatest fools on earth for having sunk to the level of such trash. All held love very cheap.

So this is what they conceal from us under so much fair seeming. Who would ever guess it, to see them so humble, obedient, ready to do anything? Ah! how proudly they raise their heads after the victory; how insolently they press their boot-heel on the forehead they adored on their knees from afar; how well they compensate for their temporary humiliation; how dearly they make us pay for their politeness, and by how many insults do they refresh themselves after the madrigals they have composed for us! What thorough-paced brutality of thought and speech; what low man-

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ners and deportment! The change is total, and not to their advantage, of a surety. Much as I had anticipated, I still fell far short of the reality.

O Idealism, blue flower with the golden heart, that bloomest under the spring skies in the perfumed breath of our soft reveries, whose fibrous roots, infinitely more tenuous than fairies' silken locks, plunge into the very depths of our souls their numberless rootlets to drain the purest of our being; O so sweet and so bitter flower, thou canst not be uprooted without our heart bleeding at every point, without red drops dripping from thy broken stem, which, falling one by one into the lake of our tears, serve to mark the halting hours of our death-watch by the bedside of passing Love.

How thou hadst grown within my soul, accursed flower, — and multiplied thy boughs in number more than nettles in a ruin. The young nightingales came to drink in thy calyx and to sing in thy shade; diamond butterflies, emerald-winged and ruby-eyed, fluttered and circled around thy delicate pistils covered with dust of gold; swarms of yellow bees sucked trustfully thy poisonous honey; the chimeras folded their swan-wings and crossed their lion's paws under their beauteous bosom to rest by thee. The tree of the Hesperides

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was not better guarded; sylphs collected the tears of the stars in the urns of the lily, and watered thee every night with their fairy watering-pots. Plant of the Ideal, more poisonous than the manchineel or the upas-tree, how hard it is, spite of thy deceitful flowers and thy poisonous scent, how hard it is to uproot thee from my soul! Neither the cedar of Lebanon, nor the giant baobab, nor the palm-tree a hundred cubits high, could together fill the place thou hast occupied all alone, little blue flower with the golden heart!

Supper at last came to an end and bed was suggested, but the number of would-be sleepers being double that of the beds, it naturally resulted that we would have to sleep either in turns or two together. The matter was simple enough for the rest of the çompany, but not at all so for me, thanks to certain prominences well enough concealed by the jerkin and tunic, but which the shirt merely would have allowed to be perceived in all their damnable roundness; and I can assure you I was not much inclined to sacrifice my incognito in favour of any of these gentlemen, who at that time seemed to me to be downright plain-spoken monsters, but whom I have since had reason to know were very good fellows, quite up to the average of their kind.

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The one whose bed I was to share was pretty well drunk. He threw himself on the mattress, a leg and an arm hanging to the ground, and at once slept, not the sleep of the just, but a sleep so deep that if the angel of the Last Judgment had blown his trump in his ear, he would not have wakened. Such a sleep greatly simplified matters; I took off only my jacket and boots, stepped across the sleeper, and stretched myself on the sheets on the side nearest the wall.

And here I was, abed with a man! A pretty good way to start out! I confess that, spite all my assurance, I was greatly moved and agitated. The situation was so strange, so novel that I could scarcely believe it other than a dream. My companion slept soundly, but, for my part, I did not close mine eyes all night.

He was a young fellow of about four and twenty, with rather handsome features, black eyelashes, and a blond moustache; his long locks waved round his head like the waves of a river-god's overset urn, his pale cheeks flushed at times, his lips were slightly parted and a faint languishing smile lingered upon them.

I raised myself on my elbow and looked at him a long time by the trembling light of a candle the tallow

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of which had almost all guttered away, while the wick was full of charred lumps.

We were separated by a pretty large space. He was on the extreme edge of one side of the bed, and I, for greater precaution, equally far on the other side.

What I had been listening to was not calculated to dispose me to tenderness and voluptuousness — I had a horror of men. Nevertheless, I was far more restless and uneasy than I ought to have been, and my body did not share, to the extent it ought to have done, the repugnance felt by my mind. My heart was beating fast, I was hot, and, turn which way I would, I could not rest.

The deepest silence reigned in the inn; only at times the sound of a horse's hoof stamping on the stable pavement was heard, or the drip of water dropping down the chimney flue on the ashes. The candle, having consumed its wick, went out in smoke.

Cimmerian darkness fell between us as it had been a curtain. You cannot imagine the effect produced upon me by the sudden disappearance of the light. It seemed to me the end had come, and that never again was I to see with my eyes. For a moment I thought of rising, but what could I have done?

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It was only two in the morning, every light was out, and I could not wander like a ghost through an unknown house. So I was compelled to stay where I was and to await the day.

There I lay, then, on my back, both hands crossed, trying to think of something and always coming back to this, that I was in bed with a man. I even went the length of wishing he would wake and find out I was a woman. No doubt the wine I had drunk, though sparingly, had something to do with this extraordinary notion, but I kept on coming back to it. I was within an ace of stretching out my hand, waking him, and telling him who I was. It was a fold of the blanket that stopped my arm which prevented my carrying out my intention; it gave me time to think, and while I was freeing my arm the common-sense I had totally lost came back to me, if not wholly, at least sufficiently to enable me to master myself.

Would it not have been funny if a fair Lady Disdain like me, who wanted to know ten years of a man's life before giving him my hand to kiss, should have given herself, in an inn, on a camp-bed, to the first comer? Yet, i' faith, I was very near to doing it.

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Is it possible that a sudden flush, a rush of blood can neutralise to such an extent the finest resolves, and does the voice of the flesh speak louder than the voice of the spirit? Every time my pride uplifts itself too much, I bring it down by recalling the remembrance of that night. I begin to share men's opinion — a woman's virtue is a very fragile thing, dependent on what, good heavens!

In vain do we seek to spread our wings, too much mud weighs them down; the body is an anchor that holds the soul to earth; in vain it spreads its sails to the breeze of its loftiest ideas, the ship remains motionless, as if every remora in the ocean clung to its keel. Nature enjoys being thus sarcastic with us. When it sees a thought, upright on its pride as on a high column, almost touch the heavens with its head, it whispers an order to the red fluid to hasten on, to press to the valves of the arteries; it commands the temples to beat, the ears to hum, and the whole idea is seized with vertigo; images mingle and vanish; the ground heaves like a ship's deck in a storm, the heavens spin around, and the stars perform a saraband; the lips, which uttered only austere maxims, pout as if for a kiss; the arms, so resolute to repulse, soften and

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become more supple and more clinging than a scarf. Add to this the contact of an epidermis, the blowing of a breath through your hair, and all is lost. Often, indeed, it does not take so much — the scent of foliage coming from the fields into your open window, the sight of two birds billing and cooing, a daisy opening its petals, an old love-song that comes back to you in spite of yourself, and that you repeat without knowing what it means, a soft wind that agitates and intoxicates you, the softness of your bed or your couch — any one of these things suffices. The very solitude of your room makes you reflect that it would be pleasant to be two in it and that no sweeter nest could be found for a covey of pleasures. The drawn curtains, the half-light, the silence, all bring you back to the fatal thought that lightly touches you with its perfidious dove-like wings, and coos gently around you. The very tissues which touch you seem to caress you, and their folds cling amorously to your body. Then the young girl opens her arms to the first lackey with whom she happens to be alone; the philosopher leaves his page unfinished, and, with head hidden in his cloak, hastens to the nearest courtesan.

I certainly did not love the man who caused me to

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be so strangely moved. His sole charm consisted in his not being a woman, which was quite enough in my then condition. A man! — that mysterious thing so carefully concealed from us; that strange animal of whom we know so little; that demon or god who alone can realise all the dreams of vague voluptuousness which the springtime gives us in our sleep, — the one thing we think about as soon as we are fifteen!

A man! The vague notion of pleasure floated in my heavy brain; the little I knew of it but excited my desire. An ardent curiosity urged me to clear up once for all the doubts that troubled me and that constantly recurred to me. The solution of the problem was on the next page; I had but to turn it — the book lay next me. A fairly handsome gallant, a rather narrow bed, a mirk night, a girl with a few glasses of champagne in her head — a most suspicious combination truly. Well, the outcome of it all was the most respectable nothingness.

On the wall on which I kept my eyes fixed I began, thanks to the decreasing darkness, to distinguish the place of the window; the panes became less opaque, and the grey light of morn stealing behind them made them transparent again; the sky gradually lighted up —

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it was day. You cannot imagine the pleasure caused me by that faint ray falling upon the green Aumale serge hangings that surrounded the glorious field of battle upon which my virtue had triumphed over my desires. It seemed to me it was a crown of victory.

As for my companion, he had rolled to the ground.

I rose, dressed myself as quickly as I could, hastened to the window and opened it. The morning breeze did me good. I stood before the mirror to dress my hair, and I was surprised at the pallor of my face — I had fancied it must be purple.

The others came in to see if we were still asleep, and kicked their friend, who did not seem much surprised to find himself where he was.

The horses were saddled and we set out again. But enough for to-day; my pen refuses to write and I do not feel like mending it; I shall relate to you the rest of my adventures another time. Meanwhile love me as I love you, Graciosa the well-named, and do not have too bad an opinion of my virtue after all I have been telling you.

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XI

MANY things are a bore. It is a bore to repay borrowed money which one has got into the way of looking upon as one's own; it is a bore to caress to-day the woman whom one loved yesterday; it is a bore to call at a house at dinner time and to find that the people have been in the country for a month; writing a novel is a bore, and it is a greater bore to read it; a bore to have a grog-blossom and chapped lips on the day one goes to visit the idol of one's soul; to wear facetious boots that grin to the pavement at every seam, and an especial bore to conceal nothingness behind the cobwebs of one's fob; a bore to be a janitor, a bore to be an emperor; a bore to be one's self, and a bore to be some one else, even; a bore to go afoot, because it hurts one's corns, and on horseback because it makes you sore, in a carriage because a stout man invariably uses your shoulder for a pillow, on a steamer because you are seasick and you throw up the whole of yourself; it is a bore to have winter, because one shivers, and summer because one perspires; but the greatest

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bore on earth, in hell, or heaven, is unquestionably a tragedy, or else a drama, or a comedy.

That really sickens me. Is there anything more foolish, more stupid? Are not those bull-voiced, stout tyrants who stride across the stage from wing to wing, swinging their hairy arms, clad in flesh-coloured tights like the sails of a windmill, but poor imitations of Blue Beard and the Ogre? Their rhodomontades would make any one who could keep awake burst into laughter.

Nor are unfortunate females in love less ridiculous. It is diverting to see them come forward, dressed in white or black, with hair weepingly outspread on their shoulders, sleeves weepingly outspread on their hands, and their body ready to spring out of their corset like a fruit-stone pressed between the fingers, appearing to drag the flooring along with the soles of their satin shoes and, at times of great emotion, throwing their train behind them with a kick of the foot. The dialogue, composed exclusively of "Oh!" and "Ah!" which they cluck out as they show off, is a truly pleasant food, of easy digestion. The princes, too, are very charming; they are a little too sombre and melancholy, but none the less the liveliest fellows in this world — and elsewhere.

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As for comedy, which is to mend manners, and which, fortunately, performs that task very ill, I think the sermons of fathers and the prosiness of uncles are just as deadly wearisome on the stage as in real life. I do not believe in doubling the number of fools by putting them on the boards; there are enough of them already, God knows, and the breed shows no sign of becoming extinct. What is the use of drawing the portrait of a man with a snout like a hog's or a mouth like a bull's, or of collecting the foolish sayings of a churl you would throw out of the window if he came to see you. The portrait of a churl is as little interesting as the churl himself, and he is none the less a churl when seen in a mirror. The actor who should succeed in imitating perfectly the attitude and manners of cobblers would not delight me much more than a real cobbler.

But there is a theatre I do love — the fantastic, extravagant, impossible theatre, in which the worthy public pitilessly hisses from the very first scene, because it cannot understand a word.

It is a curious theatre: glow-worms take the place of the footlights; a scarabæus, marking time with its antennæ, stands at the conductor's desk. The cricket sings his part; the nightingale is first flautist; little

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sylphs, issuing from the blossoms of sweet peas, hold bass-viols of lemon-skin between their pretty legs, whiter than ivory, and scrape vigorously with bows made of one of Titania's eyelashes strings made of cobweb-threads. The little full-bottomed wig that the leader of the orchestra wears trembles with pleasure and casts around a luminous powder, so sweet is the harmony and so well-performed the overture.

A curtain made of butterflies' wings and thinner than the inner pellicle of an egg, rises slowly after the regulation three knocks. The auditorium is full of poets' souls seated in mother-of-pearl stalls, and watching the play through drops of dew mounted on lily pistils. These are their opera-glasses.

The scenery is unlike any known scenery; the country it represents is yet more unknown than was America before it was discovered. The richest painter's palette has not half the tints which shimmer on it; it is all painted in the strangest and quaintest colours; ash-green, ash-blue, ultramarine, red and yellow lake abound.

The sky, of a greenish blue, is traversed by broad strips of golden and dun colour; little trees, thin and slight, show in the middle distance their sparse foliage

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tinted like faded roses; the distance, instead of melting into an azure mist, is of the liveliest apple-green, with spirals of golden smoke rising here and there. A stray sunbeam lights upon the pediment of a ruined temple or upon the spire of a tower. Cities full of finials, pyramids, domes, arcades, and slopes are seated on hills and reflected in crystal lakes; great trees, whose broad leaves have been boldly cut out by fairies' scissors, mingle their trunks and branches inextricably to form the wings. The clouds of heaven are heaped up on their tops like flakes of snow, and between the branches flash the eyes of gnomes and dwarfs, while the twisted roots plunge into the soil like some giant's hand. The green-finch strikes them rhythmically with its horny bill, and emerald lizards warm themselves in the sun on the moss at their feet.

The mushroom watches the play with its hat on its head, like the insolent fellow it is; the sweet violet rises on tiptoe between two blades of grass, and opens wide its blue eyes to watch the hero pass.

At the end of the boughs the bull-finch and linnet hang to prompt the actors.

Through the high grass, the tall purple thistles and the velvet-leaved meander, like silver snakes, brooks

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made of the tears of stags at bay; here and there gleam amid the turf anemones like blood-drops, and daisies which proudly swell out their heads crowned with pearls, like any real duchess.

The characters are of no particular time or country. They come and go without your knowing why or wherefore; they neither eat nor drink; they have neither home nor profession; they have no lands, no income, no houses; sometimes they do carry under their arm a little box full of diamonds as big as pigeons' eggs. When they walk, they do not shake a single drop of dew from the tips of flowers, and raise not a grain of the dust on the roads.

They wear the most extravagant and fantastic of garments, — steeple-crowned hats with brims as wide as a Chinese parasol, and absurdly long feathers plucked from the tail of the phœnix and the bird of paradise; capes striped in loud colours; doublets of velvet and brocade, showing the satin or silver-cloth lining in the gold-trimmed slashings; trunk-hose puffed out and rounded like balloons; scarlet stockings with embroidered clocks; high-heeled shoes with big rosettes; little small swords point up, hilt down, with innumerable buckles and ribbons. So much for the men.

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The women are no less curiously dressed. An idea of their attire may be gained from the drawings of Della Bella and Romeyn de Hooge. They wear full, rich dresses with great folds that shimmer like doves' throats and reflect every colour of the iris; great sleeves, with undersleeves issuing from them, lace ruffs of openwork rising higher than the head they thus frame in; bodices covered with knots and broidery, aiguillettes, quaint jewels, aigrettes of heron's plumes, necklaces of large pearls, fans of peacock's-feathers with mirrors in the centre, slippers and high-heeled shoes, wreaths of artificial flowers, spangles, gauzes shot with silver or gold powder, patches, — whatever, in a word, can render a stage costume more attractive and piquant.

It is not exactly in the English, the German, the French, the Turkish, the Spanish, or the Tartar taste, though a little of each, and though it has borrowed from each country whatever it has of most graceful and characteristic.

Actors thus costumed may say what they please without doing violence to probability. Fancy may roam at will, style display as it pleases its diapered rings, like a snake that warms itself in the sun; the most far-fetched concetti may ope their quaint blooms

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and shed around them their mingled scent of amber and musk. There is nothing to say them nay, whether places, names, or costume.

How charming and amusing is what they tell! It is not such perfect actors as they who would, like shouters of lines, twist their mouths and stick out the eyes in order to bring out strongly their great speech; they do not look like workmen labouring at their task, like oxen harnessed to the action and eager to be done; they are not plastered with chalk and rouge half an inch thick; they do not wear tin daggers, and they have not in reserve under their doublet a pig's bladder full of chickens' blood; they do not wear the same oil-stained rags act after act.

They speak without hurrying their delivery, without shouting, like well-bred people who do not attach much importance to what they do. The lover makes his proposal to the lady in the most detached fashion; slapping his leg, as he talks, with the tip of his white glove, or adjusting his knee-lace. The lady nonchalantly shakes the dewdrops from her nosegay and exchanges witticisms with her maid. The lover cares very little whether he moves the heart of his cruel fair; the main point with him is to let fall from his lips

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clusters of pearls, bunches of roses, and to scatter them like a true prodigal poetic genius; often, indeed, he stands aside altogether and lets the author court his mistress for him. Jealousy is not one of his faults, and he is of the most accommodating temper. His eyes fixed upon the flies of the stage, he calmly waits until the poet has said what his fancy suggested, to resume his part and kneel down again.

Complications are made and unmade with the most delightful carelessness; causes produce no effects; effects do not follow causes; the wittiest character is the stupidest; the dullest says the cleverest things; maidens talk in a way to make courtesans blush, and courtesans utter moral maxims. The most incredible adventures succeed each other without explanation; the heavy father arrives purposely from China in a bamboo junk to recognise a little girl who had been carried off; gods and fairies keep going up and down in their machines. The action plunges into the sea under the topaz dome of the waves, and meanders at the bottom of the ocean, through forests of corals and madreporæ, or else it soars heavenwards on the wings of lark and griffon. The dialogue is most catholic; the lion contributes a well roared "Oh!" the wall

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speaks with its crevices, and any one may interrupt the most interesting scene provided he has a quip, a riddle, or a pun to interject. Bottom's ass's head is as welcome as the golden locks of Ariel. The author's mind exhibits itself under every form, and all these contradictions are so many polished facets, which not only reflect the various aspects but add to them the colours of the prism.

This apparent hurly-burly and disorder turn out, after all, to reproduce real life with its fantastic ways more accurately than the most carefully studied out drama of manners. Every man is in himself all humanity, and if he writes what occurs to him he succeeds better than if he copies, with the help of a magnifying glass, objects placed outside of him.

What a lovely family it is: romantic young lovers, wandering damsels, helpful maids, caustic buffoons, valets and artless peasants, debonair kings whose names are unknown to the historian and their realms to the geographer, striped *graciosos*, clowns amazing in repartee and miraculous in somersaults, — you who allow free caprice to speak with your smiling lips, I love and adore you above all others, — Perdita, Rosalind, Celia, Pandarus, Parolles, Silvio, Leander, and the others, all

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the charming characters, so unreal and so true, that rise above coarse reality on folly's diapered wings, and who incarnate the poet's joy, melancholy, love, and most secret dreams, under the airiest and most frivolous appearance.

In this drama, written for fairies, and which has to be performed by moonlight, there is one play which especially delights me, — a play so erratic, so vagabond, with so dreamy a plot and such strange characters, that the author himself, not knowing what to call it, has given it the elastic title "As You Like It," which may mean anything.

When you read that strange play, you are carried off into an unknown world, which, however, you have faint memories of. You know not whether you are dead or alive, asleep or awake. Gracious faces smile sweetly upon you and bid you a friendly good-day as they pass; you are moved and troubled at sight of them as if you had suddenly met your ideal at a turn in the road or the ghost of your first love rose suddenly before you. Purling brooks murmur half-stifled plaints; the wind rustles through the ancient trees of the forest of eld with sympathetic wail above the old duke's head, and when melancholy Jacques drops into the current his

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philosophical complaints with the willow leaves, you fancy 't is yourself are speaking, and that the most secret and carefully hidden thought in your heart is revealed and illumined.

O young son of the brave knight Roland du Bois so ill-used by fate, I cannot help being jealous of you, — you still have a faithful servant, good Adam, whose green old age shows under his snowy hair. You are banished, but first you fought and won; your wicked brother takes all your possessions from you, but Rosalind gives you the chain from round her neck; you are poor, but loved; you have to leave your native land, but your persecutor's daughter follows you over seas.

The dark Ardennes open their great arms of foliage to receive and hide you; the kindly forest heaps up for your bed its softest mosses in its grottoes; it bends over your head its arching boughs to protect you against rain and sun; it weeps for you with the tears of its springs, the sighs of its fawns, and the bellow of its stags; it turns its rocks into complacent desks for your love epistles, lends you the thorns of its bushes to hang them on, and commands the satin bark of the quivering aspen to yield to your point when you desire to grave Rosalind's cipher.

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If we could, like you, handsome Orlando, have a great, shady forest wherein to retire and be alone with our sorrow, and if we could only meet, at the corner of a walk, her we seek, easily known though disguised! But alas! the spiritual world has no verdant Ardennes, and it is only in Poesy's garden that bloom the little wild, fanciful flowers with the memory-destroying scent. In vain do we shed tears, they fall in no silver cascades; in vain we sigh, no kindly echo takes pains to repeat our plaints, adorning them with assonance and seasoning them with wit. In vain we hang sonnets on every thorn,—Rosalind never picks them up; and it is in vain that we cut love-ciphers in the bark of trees.

Ye birds of heaven, lend me each a feather, swallow and eagle, humming-bird and roc, that I may make wings and fly high and fast through unknown regions, where I shall meet nothing to recall the city of the living, where I may forget myself, and lead a new, strange life,—farther than America, farther than Africa, farther than Asia, than the uttermost isles of the sea, through the Frozen Ocean, beyond the pole where gleams the aurora borealis, into the impalpable realm whither flee the divine creations of the poets and the types of supreme beauty.

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How is it possible to bear with the ordinary conversation in drawing-rooms once one has heard thee speak, brilliant Mercutio, whose every sentence is a golden or silvern shower, like unto fireworks bursting in a starry sky? Pallid Desdemona, how can we enjoy any earthly music after we have heard "Willow"? What woman but seems ugly by the side of your Venuses, ye sculptors of antiquity, ye poets who sing in marble?

Ah! spite of the mad embrace in which I sought to clasp the material world when the other escaped me, I feel that I am born out of due season, that life is not made for me and repels me. There is naught in which I can share; whatever the path I follow I lose my way; the smooth road and the rocky track alike lead to an abyss. If I seek to take my flight, the air grows heavy about me and I remain with extended wings I am helpless to close. I can neither walk nor fly; when I am on earth heaven attracts me; when in heaven, earth draws me back; above, the storm displumes my wings; below, the stones wound my feet, the soles of which are too tender to allow me to walk on the broken glass of reality, while my wings are not broad enough to enable me to soar above earthly things,

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and to rise, from sphere to sphere, into the deep azure of mysticism, to the inaccessible summits of eternal love. I am the most wretched hippogriph, the most pitiable make-up of heterogeneous materials that ever saw the light since the time that Ocean took to loving the moon and women to deceiving men. In comparison with me, Chimæra, the monster slain by Bellerophon, with her maiden's head, her lion's paws, her goat's body, and her dragon tail, was a being of simple make-up.

Within my frail breast dwell together the violet-strewn dreams of the chaste maiden and the mad ardours of courtesans in an orgy; my desires go about like lions, sharpening their claws and seeking what they may devour; my thoughts, more feverish, more restless than goats, hang upon the most threatening crests; my hatred, swollen with poison, twists its scaly folds into inextricable knots and slowly drags along in ruts and ravines.

A strange land indeed is my soul, in appearance a land flourishing and rich, but more penetrated by putrid and deleterious miasmata than Batavia itself. The least sunbeam that lights upon the slime brings forth reptiles and the innumerable mosquito. The

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great yellow tulips, the nagassaries and the blooms of the angsoka gorgeously conceal foul rottenness. The amorous rose opes its scarlet lips and smiles as it exhibits its dewdrop teeth to the gallant nightingales that recite madrigals and sonnets to her, but it is safe to wager that, charming as the scene is, below, in the grass, at the foot of the bush, a dropsical toad crawls on crippled legs and silvers its path with slime.

Here are springs clearer and more limpid than the purest diamond, yet were it better to drink of the stagnant marsh water, with its mantle of rotten reeds and drowned dogs, than to fill your cup from their wave. At the bottom is concealed a serpent that whirls round with dreadful speed and forever distils its venom.

You have sown wheat, and instead spring up asphodel, tares, and pallid hemlock with verdigrised shoots. Instead of the root you planted, you are surprised to see come up the hairy and gnarled limbs of the black mandragora.

Leave a remembrance there and return for it some time later, you will find it more moss-green and overrun with roaches and disgusting insects than a stone placed upon the damp soil of a cellar.

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Do not attempt to traverse its dark forests; they are more impassable than the virgin forests of America and the jungles of Java; creepers as big as cables pass from tree to tree; plants, sharp and bristling like lance-heads, bar every issue; the sward itself is covered with a down that stings like the nettle. The vampire bat hangs from the arches of the trees; enormous beetles wave threatening horns and beat the air with their quadruple wings; monstrous, fantastic animals, like those of our nightmares, crash heavily forward through the reeds. Herds of elephants that nip to death flies between the folds of their dry skin or rub their sides against the stones and trees, rhinoceroses with thick hide, hippopotami with huge hairy snout, trampling the wood and detritus of the forest with their huge feet.

In the glades, where the sun darts a luminous beam like a golden wedge through the warm moisture, on the spot where you would like to sit down, you always find a tiger's family lazily lolling, inhaling the air, slowly winking their sea-green eyes, and licking their velvet fur with their blood-red, papillæ-covered tongue, or a knot of pythons half asleep digesting the bull they last swallowed.

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Beware of everything — grass, fruit, air, water, sun, and shade; everything is deadly. Close your ears to the chatter of the little golden-billed, emerald-necked parrots that alight from the trees on your fingers and flutter their wings, for the pretty little parrots with the emerald necks and the golden bills will end by prettily picking out your eyes at the very moment you are bending to kiss them. That is the way of it!

The world will have none of me; it repulses me as though I were a spectre escaped from the tomb, and I am almost as pallid as if I were. My blood will not believe that I am alive, and refuses to colour my skin; it flows slowly in my veins like still water in a choked drain. Naught of what makes men's hearts beat quickens mine. My woes and my joys are not the joys and woes of my fellows. I have violently desired what is desired by no one, and disdained what others madly desire. I have loved women who did not love me, and been loved when I would I had been hated, — always too soon or too late, too far or not far enough, hither or thither, but never just what ought to have been; either I did not get to the point or I went beyond it. I have thrown away my life or

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else I have concentrated it to excess on a single point, and from the busybody's useless activity I have got to the dull somnolence of the opium-eater or of the Stylite on his pillar.

Whatever I do always has the appearance of a dream; my acts seem rather the result of somnambulism than that of free will; there is something in me which I vaguely feel deep down, which makes me act without my concurring in the act, and always outside of ordinary laws. I never see the plain and natural side of things until after all the others; I light first on the eccentric and unusual. If the line happens to be in the least askew I turn it into a spiral more twisted than a serpent; if the outlines are not drawn with the utmost clearness, they soon grow vaguer and become deformed. Faces assume a supernatural appearance and gaze upon me with terrifying eyes.

So by a sort of instinctive reaction I have always clung desperately to matter, to the external form of things, and have given a very important place to plasticity in art. I thoroughly understand a statue, and do not understand a man; where life begins I stop and draw back in terror, as if I had beheld the

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Medusa. The phenomenon of life causes an amazement in me that I cannot overcome. I have no doubt I should make an excellent corpse, for I am a very poor living being and the feeling of my existence escapes me completely. The sound of my voice surprises me to an unimaginable degree, and I am sometimes tempted to think it is some one else's voice. If I wish to stretch out my arm, and my arm obeys me, the fact strikes me as prodigious and fills me with the greatest amazement.

On the other hand, Silvio, I thoroughly understand the unintelligible; the most extravagant propositions appear most natural to me, and I grasp them with remarkable facility. I can easily supply the conclusion of the most fantastic and the wildest of nightmares. This is why the kind of play of which I was telling you just now pleases me above all others.

Theodore, Rosette, and I have long discussions on this subject. Rosette does not much care for my system, she is a partisan of real truth; Theodore gives the poet more latitude and admits a conventional and optical truth. For my part, I maintain that the author must be wholly free, and that fancy must be supreme.

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Many of the guests took their stand chiefly on the fact that such plays are usually outside dramatic conditions and could not be performed; to which I replied that they were partly right and partly wrong, like pretty much everything that is said, and that the views held on the possibilities and impossibilities of the stage seemed to me to lack soundness, and to spring from prejudices rather than reasons. I stated, among other things, that the play of "As You Like It" could readily be performed, especially by society people who were not in the habit of playing other parts.

This suggested the idea of performing the play. The season is drawing on and all the modes of amusement have been exhausted; every one is tired of hunting-parties, riding-parties, water-parties; the chances at boston, varied as they are, lack enough piquancy to fill up an evening, and the proposal to give a play was received with universal enthusiasm.

A young fellow who can paint offered to take charge of the scenery; he is even now hard at work upon it and it will be ready in a few days. The stage is erected in the orangery, the largest room in the mansion, and I think all will go well. I play Orlando. Rosette was to be Rosalind, naturally; being my

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mistress and the mistress of the house, the part was hers by right, but she refused to dress in men's clothes, — rather a singular caprice for her to indulge in, for prudery is assuredly not one of her faults. Had I not been sure of the contrary I should have supposed she had ill-shapen limbs. Now, none of the ladies in the company would allow herself to be less scrupulous than Rosette, and the piece was nearly given up in consequence, but Theodore, who had taken the part of the melancholy Jacques, offered to take Rosette's place, as Rosalind is almost always in male attire except in the first act, where she dresses as a woman, and with powder, rouge, a pair of stays, and a gown he could readily enough pass muster, the more so that he is still beardless and has a very waspish waist.

We are busy learning our parts, and it is amusing to watch us. You may rely on coming upon, in the most solitary recesses of the park, some one of us, book in hand, muttering sentences, looking up to heaven, gazing suddenly at the ground, and repeating the same gesture seven or eight times. If it were not known that we are getting up a play, we would certainly be taken for a houseful of maniacs or poets (which is a pleonasm).

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I think we shall soon know our lines well enough to have a rehearsal. I expect the performance will be peculiar, but I may be wrong. I feared for a moment lest our people, instead of playing as they felt inspired, would try to reproduce the attitudes and the vocal inflections of some popular actor; but they have happily not frequented the theatre sufficiently to fall into such a mistake, and I incline to believe that, maugre the awkwardness of people who have never trod the boards, they will exhibit flashes of naturalness and charming artlessness such as the most consummate talent could not reproduce.

Our young painter has done wonders: it would be impossible to give a stranger air to the old tree-trunks and the ivies which cling to them. He took for models those in the park, but strengthened and exaggerated them in parts, as should be done in stage scenery. He has done all his work with admirable vigour and fancy; the stones, the rocks, the clouds have mysterious, grimacing shapes; shimmering reflections play upon waters more quivering and mobile than quicksilver itself, and the usual coldness of the foliage is superbly relieved by the saffron tints which autumn has brushed upon it; the colour of the forest

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ranges from emerald-green to cornelian-purple; the warmest and coolest tones contrast harmoniously, and the sky itself melts from the most glowing tints into the tenderest blue.

He has drawn all the costumes with my assistance; they are uncommonly characteristic. At first it was urged they could never be made out of silks and velvets or any known stuffs, and for a brief moment I had reason to fear that troubadour dresses would carry the day. The ladies objected that the brilliant colours would dim their glances; whereto I replied that their eyes were stars that could not be extinguished, and that, on the contrary, their glances would cause the colours to pale and eclipse the foot-lights, the chandelier, and even the sun, if it chanced along. They had nothing to say to that, but other objections arose in bristling masses like the Lernæan hydra; no sooner had I cut down one than another arose more stupid still and more obstinate.

"How do you expect that to keep on?" — "It is all right on paper, but quite another thing on one's back. I shall never get inside that!" — "My skirt is at least four inches too short; I shall never dare to show myself in such fashion!" — "The ruff is too high; I

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look as if I were a humpback and had no neck." — "That way of dressing my hair makes me look as old as the hills." — "Starch, pins, and willingness will make anything hang together." — "Nonsense, with a waist like yours, that would shame a wasp and would be at ease in my finger-ring! I'll wager twenty-five louis to a kiss that your bodice will have to be taken in." — "Your skirt is far from being too short, and if you could only see how lovely your limbs are, you would certainly be of my opinion." — "On the contrary, your neck shows admirably in its aureole of lace." — "That way of dressing your hair does not age you at all; but even if you did seem a few years older, you are so exceedingly young that you really cannot care a straw about it; the fact is that if we did not know where the pieces of your last doll are, we should entertain the strangest suspicions" — and so on, and so on.

You can have no idea of the prodigious number of madrigals we have had to expend before we could induce the ladies to put on lovely costumes which became them exceedingly.

We had endless trouble also in making them put on their patches properly. Women have pretty bad taste,

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and there is nothing worse than the obstinacy of a flighty coquette who is convinced that straw glacé suits her better than jonquil or bright rose. I feel certain that had I applied to public affairs one half the skill I have spent on ruses and intrigues to have a red feather put on the right instead of the left, I should now be a minister of state or an emperor, at the very least.

What a pandemonium must a professional theatre be! — what a frightful and unmanageable crowd!

Since the idea of a play was started, everything here is in the most thorough confusion. Every drawer is wide open, every wardrobe emptied, — it looks as if the place had been sacked. Tables, arm-chairs, side-tables, everything is lumbered up; there is no room for the sole of one's feet. Scattered all over the house are prodigious numbers of gowns, mantles, veils, skirts, capes, toques, hats, and when you reflect that all this is to be worn by seven or eight persons you cannot help thinking of those artists at country fairs who wear eight or ten suits one over another, and it is hard to believe that but one costume apiece will come out of the heap.

The servants are going and coming all the time; there are two or three of them constantly travelling be-

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tween the mansion and the town, and if this is kept up every horse in the stables will be broken-winded.

A theatrical manager has no time to be melancholy, and I have not been for some time past. I am so deafened and bothered that I am beginning not to know what the play is about. As I am manager, in addition to playing Orlando, I have to do double duty. Whenever a difficulty occurs recourse is had to me, and as my decisions are not always accepted as are those of an oracle, the result is endless discussion.

If living consists in being always on one's feet, replying to a score of people, going up and down stairs, not having a minute in which to think during the whole day, then I have never lived so much as this week; and yet I am not so much excited as might be thought. The agitation is not very deep, and a few fathoms below the surface there is again dead, motionless water; life does not penetrate into me quite so easily; indeed the very time when I am least alive is when I appear to be very energetic and to be taking part in what is going on. Action stupefies and wearies me to a degree you cannot conceive; when I am not acting, I think, or at least I dream, and that is one way of living; I lose it as soon as I emerge from my porcelain idol's rest.

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Up to this I have done nothing, and I do not know that I shall ever do anything. I cannot stop my brain, which makes the difference between a man of talent and a man of genius; it is an endless bubbling up, one wave drives on another. I cannot master that sort of internal rush from the heart to the head which drowns all my thoughts for want of issues. I am unable to produce anything, — not through sterility, but through superabundance; my ideas shoot up so thick and close that they stifle one another and cannot ripen. No execution, however swift and lightning-like, can attain such a speed; when I write a sentence the thought it is to express is already as far from me as if a century and not a second only had lapsed, and often I mix with it, spite of myself, something of the thought which has replaced it in my brain.

That is why I cannot live, either as poet or lover. I can express those ideas only which have already escaped me; I possess women only when I have forgotten them and taken to loving others. Man as I am, how could I make my will manifest, since, hasten as I may, I no longer feel what I am doing and act merely upon a vague reminiscence?

I shall never be able to take a thought from its

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matrix in the brain, to bring it out first in the rough, like a block of marble taken from the quarry, to place it before me, and from morning till night, chisel in one hand, mallet in the other, chip, cut, scrape, and carry off at night a pinch of dust to throw on my writing.

I can clearly separate in my mind the lissome figure from the rough block; I see it very plainly; but there are so many angles to cut away, so many chips to knock off, so many strokes of smoother and mallet to strike, in order to get at all near the form and to secure the true curve of the contour, that my hands blister and I let fall the chisel.

Should I persist, the fatigue becomes so intense that my sight is quite darkened, and the marble cloud prevents my beholding the white goddess concealed within its depths. Then I grope after it at haphazard: I cut too deep in one place and not deep enough in another; I break off what was to have been a leg or an arm, and leave a solid lump where a hollow should be. Instead of a goddess I turn out a shapeless figure, even less than that sometimes; and the superb block, extracted at such great cost and with so much labour from the bowels of the earth, hammered, carved, worked out in every part,

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seems rather to have been bored by worms to make a hive, than fashioned by a sculptor in accordance with a definite plan.

How did you manage, Michael Angelo, to slice off the marble as a child cuts a chestnut? Of what steel were your unconquered chisels? And from what robust loins have you sprung, all of you fruitful, hard-working artists, whom no material can resist and who realise your whole dream in colour or in bronze?

It is, in a way, an innocent and permissible bit of vanity, after what I have just said about myself, and you, Silvio, will not be the one to blame me for it; but, though the world will never know it and though my name is foredoomed to forgetfulness, I too am a poet and a painter. I have conceived thoughts as beauteous as those of any poet that ever lived; I have created as pure, as divine types as the most admired of those of the old masters. I see them before me as clear and distinct as if they were actually painted, and could I but cut and glaze a hole in my head for people to look into it, it would be the most marvellous picture-gallery ever known. No earthly sovereign can boast of possessing one like it. I have in it some Rubens as resplendent in colour, as vivid, as the very best at Ant-

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werp; my Raphaels are in the highest state of preservation, and his Madonnas smile not more graciously; Buonarotti has not drawn muscular action more vigorously and superbly than in my work; the Venetian sun shines on this canvas just as though it were signed Paulus Cagliari; the deep shadows of Rembrandt himself are crowded into that picture in which quivers in the distance a faint spot of light; the paintings in my own particular manner would assuredly be disdained by no one.

I know very well that it is a strange thing for me to talk thus, and that it makes me appear stupidly intoxicated with the most absurd pride, but the fact is as I have stated it, and nothing can change my belief in it. No one will share it; I cannot help that. Every one of us is born sealed with a black or a white seal. Mine appears to be black.

Occasionally, even, I find it difficult to conceal this belief of mine sufficiently. It has often happened to me to speak in too familiar fashion of those great geniuses whose footsteps we ought to adore and whose statues should be gazed at from afar and on bended knee. Once I did so far forget myself as to say, "We." Fortunately it was to one who did not

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notice it, else I should have been taken for the most conceited ass that ever lived.

Surely, Silvio, I am both poet and painter. It is a mistake to believe that all those who had the reputation of being geniuses were really greater men than others. No one knows how much Raphael's reputation owes to the pupils and obscure painters whom he employed on his works; he appended his signature to the intellect and talent of many — that is all.

A great painter, a great writer occupy the attention of, and fill a whole century, and the first thing they do is to try all the different *genres* at once, so that should any rivals arise they can forthwith accuse them of plagiarism, and thus stop them at the outset of their career. It is a very well-known trick, which, old as it is, proves successful every day.

It may happen that an already famous man has exactly the same kind of talent that you have; under pain of passing for his imitator you are obliged to thwart your natural inspiration, and to turn it into another channel. You were born to blow a blast upon the heroic trump, or to call up the pallid phantoms of bygone ages, — you have to caress the seven-note flute, or make knots on a sofa at the back of some

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boudoir; and this because you were not born eight or ten years earlier, and the world cannot understand that two men should cultivate the same field at the same time.

Thus it is that many a noble mind is forced to follow a road which it knows to be the wrong one, and to continually skirt its own proper domain from which it is banished, counting itself lucky if it can occasionally cast a furtive glance over the hedge, and see, blooming on the other side, the beautiful richly coloured flowers of which it possesses the seed, but which it cannot sow for want of ground.

As far as I am concerned, bar the greater or less fortunate concourse of circumstances, the greater or less amount of air and sunshine, the fact of a door being shut which should have been open, a meeting missed, some one unknown whom I ought to have known, I am not sure that I should ever have succeeded, for I do not possess the requisite amount of stupidity to become what is called a *genius*, absolutely, nor the amazing obstinacy which is then apotheosised under the fine appellation of "will," once the great man has reached the mountain's crest, and without which, indeed, he cannot reach the summit. I am too well

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aware of the hollowness of all things, of their being but rottenness, to allow myself to be long attached to any one, and to pursue it ardently and solely through all obstacles.

Men of genius are very narrow; that is how they come to be men of genius. Their lack of intelligence prevents their perceiving the obstacles which intervene between them and the object they are resolved to reach; they push on, and in two or three strides they have traversed the intervening space. Their minds being completely closed to certain influences, and taking account only of those matters which immediately pertain to their projects, they expend greatly less thought and action. Nothing disturbs, nothing turns them; they act instinctively rather than from motives, and several, if withdrawn from their special sphere, are null to a degree difficult to comprehend.

Undoubtedly the gift of writing in verse is a rare and delightful one, and few people enjoy poetry and all that belongs to it more than I do. Yet I decline to bound and circumscribe my life within the twelve feet of an alexandrine; many a thing interests me fully as much as a hemistich, — not the state of society and needed reforms, to be sure, for little care I whether the

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peasantry can read and write, or whether mankind eats bread or browses grass, — but there come to me, in a single hour, innumerable visions which have no relation whatever to cæsura or rime; and that is why I produce so little, though I am fuller of ideas than many a poet who might well be burned alive along with his works.

I adore beauty and feel it in my inmost being; I can describe it as well as can the sculptors most in love with it; yet I turn out no sculpture. The ugliness and imperfection of the first model are repulsive to me; I have not the patience to wait until the work becomes perfect by dint of polishing and repolishing it. If I could make up my mind to leave some things in what I do, be it verse, be it painting, I might perchance succeed in producing a poem or a picture that would make me famous, and those who love me (supposing any one on earth takes that trouble) would not be compelled to believe me on my mere assurances, and would be furnished with a triumphant reply to the sardonic detractors of the great genius that I am.

I see many who pick up palette and brushes, and cover a canvas with colour without troubling themselves further about what fancy causes to appear under their brush, and others who write a hundred lines on

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end without scratching out a word, or once looking up at the ceiling. I always admire those people, even if I do not admire their work; I envy with all my heart their delightful intrepidity and their happy blindness which prevents their seeing their most glaring faults. But the moment I have done a bit of bad drawing I see it, and it worries me beyond measure, and being much better at the theory than the practice, it often happens that I am unable to correct a mistake of which I am conscious. Then I turn my canvas with its face to the wall, and never touch it again. The idea of perfection is so very present to my mind that disgust for my work takes hold of me at once, and prevents my going on with it.

Ah! when I compare the sweet smile of my conception with the ugly face it makes on the canvas or the paper, when I see flapping by an ugly bat instead of the fair dream which outspread its wings of light in the bosom of my night, when I see a thistle come up instead of a rose, and hear the braying of an ass when I expected to be thrilled by the suave melodiousness of the nightingale, I am so horribly disappointed, so angry with myself, so mad at my own impotence, that I resolve never again to write or speak a single word,

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rather than commit such high treason against my thoughts.

I cannot even manage to write a letter in the way I would; I often say something quite different. Certain parts are amplified to excess, others abbreviated to attenuation, and very frequently the idea I desired to express is wholly absent or appears only in the postscript.

When I began writing to you I certainly did not intend to say one half of what I have said. I merely intended to let you know that we were going to give a play; but the word brings on the sentence; the parentheses are big with other little parentheses that, in their turn, are full of others of the same kind ready to come forth. There is no reason why this sort of thing should ever end, why it should not be prolonged through two hundred folio volumes — which would unquestionably be too much.

The moment I pick up my pen my brain is alive with a buzzing and a whirring of wings as if clouds of chafers had been let loose in it. The buzz and whir collides with the walls of my skull, turns, descends with horrible uproar; it is my thoughts trying to fly forth and seeking an issue. They all endeavour

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to get out at once; more than one breaks its legs and tears the gauze of its wings, and at times the door is so crowded with them that not one can cross the threshold and reach the paper.

Such is my make-up, — imperfect, no doubt, but whose is the fault? Not mine, certainly, who cannot help it, but that of the gods. I need not ask for indulgence on your part, dear Silvio; it is mine without the asking, and you peruse to the very end my illegible scrawls, my aimless and formless reveries. Disconnected and absurd though they be, they always interest you because they are mine, and whatever comes from me, bad though it may be, is valued by you. I may let *you* see what most revolts ordinary mortals — sincere pride. But let us call a truce to all these fine things, and, since it is of the play we are to give that I am writing to you, let us return to it and talk of it a little.

The rehearsal took place to-day, and never have I been so upset in my life, — not because of the nervousness inseparable from having to declaim something before many people, but for another reason. We were dressed and ready to begin; Theodore alone had not arrived. We sent to his room to find out what

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was delaying him, and he sent back word that he would soon be ready and was on the point of coming down.

He came, in fact. I heard his step in the hall long before he appeared, and yet no one treads as lightly as he does; but the sympathy I feel for him is so great that I divine, as it were, what he is doing even when we are separated by walls, and when I felt he was going to grasp the door-handle I began to tremble and my heart beat atrociously fast. It seemed to me that a crisis in my life had come, and that I had reached a long expected solemn moment.

The door opened and closed slowly. There was one universal cry of admiration. The men applauded, the ladies flushed crimson. Rosette alone turned excessively pale and leaned against the wall, as if a sudden light had come to her. She made inversely the same movement as I. I have always suspected that she was in love with Theodore.

Undoubtedly, at that moment she thought, as I did, that the fictitious Rosalind was in very truth none other than a young and lovely woman, and the rickety air-castle of her hopes crashed suddenly to the ground, whilst mine rose again from its ruins. At least that

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is what I thought; I may perhaps be mistaken, for I was in no condition to make accurate observations.

Apart from Rosette, three or four pretty women were present; they all seemed to be revoltingly ugly. By the side of that sun the star of their beauty was suddenly eclipsed, and we all asked ourselves how we could have thought them passable even. Men who, up till now, would have counted themselves fortunate to have them for mistresses, would scarce have accepted them as servants.

The image which until now had showed but faintly and in scarce defined outline, the adored phantom pursued in vain, stood there before me, living, tangible, no longer in mist and half-light, but bathed in floods of white light; not under a vain disguise, but in its real dress; not under the derisive form of a youth, but with the features of the loveliest of women.

I experienced a feeling of mighty comfort, as if a mountainous weight had been lifted off my chest. I felt my horror of myself vanish, and I was freed from the misery of looking on myself as a monster. I got to having a most pastoral opinion of myself, and all the violets of spring bloomed anew in my heart.

He, or she, rather (for I will not allow myself to

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remember that I was ass enough to mistake her for a man), remained one moment motionless on the threshold, as if to give us all time to utter our first exclamation. A brilliant beam lighted her up from head to foot, and against the dark background of the hall, which grew less dense beyond, the carved jambs and lintel of the door framing her in, she shone radiant, just as if the light came from her instead of being merely reflected, and she looked more like a marvellous work of the painter's brush than like a being of flesh and blood.

Her long brown hair, with cords of great pearls twisted in it, fell in natural curls down her beautiful cheeks. Her shoulders and bosom were bare, and never have I seen anything fairer in this world; the purest marble did not approach her exquisite perfection. Life could be seen coursing under the transparent shadows; the skin was white and flushed at one and the same time; harmoniously golden shades made a happy transition between the skin and the hair; the soft curves of her neck, more supple and velvety than that of the swan, were ravishing poems. If there were words to express what I feel, I would send you a description covering fifty pages, but languages have been

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He, or she, rather, remained one moment motionless on the threshold

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made by dolts who had never looked at a woman's back or bosom, and half the indispensable terms are wanting.

Really I think that I shall have to turn sculptor, for it is enough to drive one mad to have seen such beauty and to be unable to reproduce it in some way. I have written twenty sonnets on her shoulders, but they are not enough; I want something tangible and exactly like; verse reproduces merely the shadow of beauty, and not beauty itself. The painter obtains a more accurate reproduction, but it is only an appearance. Sculpture is as real as a sham can be; it has so many sides, it casts a shadow and is tangible. Your mistress in sculpture differs from the original merely in that it is rather harder, and cannot talk, — two but slight defects.

Her dress was made of shot stuff, showing azure in the light or in the shade; close-fitting buskins shod feet which did not require this aid to be too small, and scarlet silk stockings clung amorously to the most beautifully turned and alluring legs. Her arms were bare to the elbows, where they emerged, round, plump, white, and splendid as burnished silver, and of incredible beauty of shape, from a fluffiness of lace. From

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her hands, covered with rings, dangled a great fan of many strangely coloured feathers which looked like a pocket rainbow.

She came into the room, her cheek flushed with a colour that was not due to rouge, every one expressing ecstatic astonishment and wondering if it were possible that this was indeed Theodore de Sérannes, the bold horseman, the insatiable duellist, the resolute sportsman, and whether he was quite sure that he was not his own twin sister.

One would have sworn he had never worn any other dress, for he was not in the least awkward, walking in it with ease and never getting entangled in his train, while he used his eyes and his fan with consummate art. Then his waist was so small — it could have been clasped with one hand. Prodigious! marvellous! The illusion was perfect; one could have sworn he had breasts, so plump and full was his chest, and besides, not a hair on his face, not a single solitary one. And so sweet a voice! A fair Rosalind indeed, and who would not be her Orlando?

Yes, who would not be Orlando to her, even at the cost of the torments I have suffered? To love, as I did, with a monstrous love, never to be confessed,

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but which one cannot uproot from one's heart; to be condemned, as I was, to preserve the deepest silence, and to have to forbid one's self what the most discreet and respectful lover would fearlessly say to the most prudish and most stand-off of women; to be devoured by insensate fires, inexcusable even in the eyes of the most abandoned libertines,—what are ordinary passions compared with that, a passion shameful in itself, hopeless, and the improbable satisfaction of which would be a crime and would kill you with the shame of it? To be reduced to pray for failure, to dread favouring chances and opportunities, and to avoid them as carefully as another would seek them, such was my fate.

I had sunk into the deepest discouragement; I contemplated myself with a sense of horror mingled with surprise and curiosity. What was chiefly revolting to me was that I had never loved before, and that this mad passion was the first effervescence of youth in me, the first bloom of my springtime of love.

This monstrous thing had taken in me the place of the fresh and chaste illusions of youth. So then my dreams of love, so tenderly caressed at eve, on the edge of the woods, on the narrow crimsoned paths, or along

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the white-marble terraces near the pond in the park, were to be transformed into that perfidious sphinx, with the doubtful smile, the ambiguous voice, in front of which I stood without venturing to read the riddle. To read it wrongly would have been death to me, for alas! it is the only link that binds me to earth; once it breaks, all will be over with me. Take that one spark from me and I become more deathly and inanimate than the mummy of the oldest Pharaoh in its bonds of linen bands.

At the very times when I felt most strongly drawn towards Theodore I threw myself with terror back into Rosette's arms, although she was infinitely distasteful to me. I tried to use her as a barrier and a shield between him and me, and I felt secret complacency, when lying by her side, at the thought that she, at least, was indubitably a woman, and that, if I had ceased to love her, I was still sufficiently loved by her to prevent our relationship degenerating into mere intrigue and debauch.

Yet I felt withal, deep within me, a sort of regret at being thus unfaithful to the thought of my impossible passion; I reproached myself with it as if it were an act of treason; and although well aware that

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I should never possess the object of my love, I was angry with myself and became once more cold to Rosette.

The rehearsal went off much better than I had ventured to hope. Theodore especially was splendid, and I also was considered to have played in a superior fashion. That was not due, however, to my possessing the qualities which one needs in order to be a good actor, and it would be a great mistake to suppose that I am capable of playing other parts equally well; but by singular fortune, the words I had to speak were so well suited to my situation that they seemed to be of my own invention rather than learned from a book. Had my memory played me false in certain places I should assuredly not have hesitated a moment to fill the gap with improvised words. Orlando was as much myself as I was Orlando, and a more remarkable coincidence would be impossible.

In the wrestling scene, when Theodore took the chain from his neck and presented it to me, as is laid down in the part, he gave me a look so softly languorous, so full of promises, and he uttered with such grace and nobleness the words, "Fair sir, wear this in memory of me, — of a maiden who would fain give

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you more had she more to give," that I was fairly upset, and I could scarce return: "What passion ties my tongue and binds it with fetters? I cannot speak to her, yet doth she desire to entertain me. O wretched Orlando!"

In the third act, Rosalind, dressed in male attire and bearing the name of Ganymede, reappears with her cousin, who has changed her name to Aliena. The impression I then received was painful. I had already grown so accustomed to the woman's dress which permitted my desire to harbour some hope and kept up a perfidious but seductive error! We quickly accustom ourselves to look upon our wishes as realised, upon the faith of the most fleeting appearances, and I became quite gloomy when Theodore reappeared in his man's dress, — gloomier than I had been before; for joy but brings out grief more strongly, the sun but deepens the horror of darkness, and the brightness of white is intended but to enhance the full sadness of black. His coat was most gallant and coquettish, elegantly and fancifully cut, and richly adorned with frillings and ribbons, somewhat in the fashion of the "moulds of form" of the Court of Louis XIII; a high-crowned felt hat, with long curly feather, shaded

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his beautiful locks, and a damascened sword cocked up his travelling-cloak.

Yet he was dressed in a way that made one feel there was a female filling to these masculine garments; the greater width of the hips, the greater fulness of the bosom, something of wavy that stuffs never show on a man's form, left but slight doubts as to the sex of the wearer.

He had a semi-deliberate, semi-timid look most amusing to behold; with infinite art he had managed to give himself an air of being as ill at ease in a dress he daily wore, as he had of being quite at his ease in an attire unfamiliar to him.

I recovered somewhat my peace of mind, and again I persuaded myself that he was in very deed a woman. I became collected enough to proceed properly with my part.

Do you know the play? Perhaps not. For the past fortnight I have been doing nothing but read and spout it, and I know it all by heart, so I cannot conceive that everybody else is not as fully cognizant of the knot and the plot as I am myself. I am rather given to making the mistake of fancying, when I am drunk, that the whole world is drunk and lurching

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against the walls, and if I knew Hebrew you may be sure I should tell my servant in Hebrew to bring me my dressing-gown and my slippers, and I should be much surprised if he did not understand me. You shall read the play if you like; meanwhile I shall assume that you have read it and I shall refer to those parts only which bear upon the situation in which I find myself.

Rosalind, walking in the forest with her cousin, is greatly surprised to find that the bushes bear, instead of blackberries and brambleberries, madrigals in her praise, strange fruits, which are not, happily, in the habit of growing there, for it is much preferable, when one is athirst, to come upon good berries than poor sonnets. Celia, who has already met Orlando, tells her, after much pressing, that the author of the verses is none other than the youth who vanquished Charles, the duke's wrestler.

Orlando himself soon appears, and Rosalind opens the conversation by inquiring the time of day. This is certainly an extremely simple opening; there cannot well be anything more commonplace. But do not fear; out of that commonplace, every-day phrase will forthwith spring up a crop of unexpected concetti, full

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of quaint flowers and comparisons, as from the most fertile and well-enriched soil.

After a few lines of sparkling dialogue, in which every word, as it strikes the sentence, sends flying right and left a shower of mad sparks, as a hammer strikes them from a red-hot iron bar, Rosalind asks Orlando if perchance he knows the man who hangs odes upon hawthorns and elegies on brambles, and who seems to have the quotidian of love upon him, — a disorder for which she possesses a certain cure. Orlando owns to her that he is himself the love-shak'd swain, and that since he, Ganymede, boasts of having more than one infallible recipe for the cure of the malady, he will do him the favour of giving him one. "You in love?" replies Rosalind; "there is none of the true lover's marks upon you: a lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; your hose should be ungarter'd, your sleeve unbutton'd, but on the contrary the ribbon on your shoe is most gracefully tied. If you are in love it is with your own self, and my remedies are of no use to you."

It was with real feeling that I replied in the words of my part, which I here set down textually, —

"Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love."

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That utterly unexpected, utterly strange reply, for which no preparation is made, and which a poet's foresight seemed to have written expressly for me, impressed me deeply as I spoke it to Theodore, whose divine lips still pouted slightly with the ironic expression in the words he had just uttered, whilst his eyes smiled with inexpressible sweetness, and a bright beam of kindness lighted all the upper part of his young and lovely face.

"Me believe it! You may as soon make her that you love believe it; which, I warrant, she is apter to do than to confess she does; that is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their consciences. But, in good sooth, are you he that hangs the verses on the trees, wherein Rosalind is so admired? And do you really need a remedy for your lunacy?"

When she has fully assured herself that it is indeed Orlando, and none else, who has rimed these admirable many-footed verses, fair Rosalind consents to impart her recipe to him. It consists in this: she pretended to be the fair of the love-sick swain, who was set to court her as if she were really his mistress, and in order to disgust him with his love, she indulged in the most fantastic caprices — now weeping, now laughing;

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now welcoming, now repulsing him; she scratched him, spat in his face; was never two minutes the same, — coquettish, flighty, prudish, languorous; she was all in turns and, besides, all that boredom, vapours, and blue devils can suggest in the way of disjointed fancies to an empty-headed coquette; all this the poor devil had to bear with or had to perform. A will o' the wisp, a monkey, and an attorney rolled into one could not have invented more tricks. This miraculous treatment had not failed to produce its effect; the patient had been driven from his mad humour of love to a living humour of madness; which was, to forswear the full stream of this world, and to live in a nook merely monastic, — a most satisfactory result, which, besides, might reasonably be expected.

Orlando, it will readily be believed, cares little to recover his health by such means, but Rosalind insists, and is resolved to undertake the cure. And she spoke these words, "I would cure you if you would but call me Rosalind, and come every day to my cote and woo me," with so marked and plain a meaning, and casting on me a glance so strange, that I could not avoid giving it a wider import than the words themselves contain, or refrain from understanding it as an

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indirect invitation to declare my real feelings. And when Orlando replies, "With all my heart, good youth," she said, still more significantly and as if annoyed at not being understood, "Nay, you must call me Rosalind."

I may have been mistaken and have fancied I saw what was not there, but it seemed to me that Theodore had perceived my love, although I never breathed a word of it to him, and that under the veil of these borrowed expressions, under the stage mask, with these hermaphrodite speeches, he alluded to his real sex and to the situation we were in. It is out of the question that so clever a woman as she is, who has so great a knowledge of the world, should have failed to discern, from the very outset, what was going on in my heart. If my lips were closed, my eyes and my emotions spoke plainly enough, and the veil of ardent friendship I had thrown over my love was not so impenetrable but that an attentive and interested observer could easily see through it. The most innocent girl, with the least knowledge of the world, would not have been stopped a minute by it.

Some important reason, which I cannot fathom, no doubt compels the lady to wear that accursed disguise,

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the cause of all my torments, which nearly made an abnormal lover out of me. But for that disguise all would have gone smoothly, easily, like a carriage with well-oiled wheels on a smooth, level road sprinkled with fine sand; I might have allowed myself to indulge in fullest security the most amorously vagabond reveries, and to take in my hand the little white, satiny hand of my goddess without shuddering with horror and starting back twenty paces, as if I had touched a red-hot iron or felt the claws of Beelzebub himself.

Instead of being in a state of despair and agitation, like a lunatic, of worrying myself into feeling remorse and grieving because I do not feel it, I should have said to myself, every morning as I stretched out my arms, with a feeling of duty accomplished and with a conscience at peace, "I am in love;" which is just as pleasant a sentence of three or four words as any other of the same length that one can think of to say in the morning, with one's head on a downy pillow — save, nevertheless, this one, "I have money."

After rising I should have planted myself in front of my mirror, and, gazing on myself with a sort of respect, I should have been moved, while combing my hair, by my poetic pallor, and I should have resolved

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to turn it to good account and use it to the utmost, for there is nothing so ignoble as to make love with a crimson face. When a man is so unfortunate as to be high-complexioned and in love, I believe he ought to whiten his face every day, or give up being in the fashionable set and keep to the Mollies and Biddies.

Next, I should have breakfasted solemnly and gravely in order to feed up my beloved body, that precious casket of passion, to make for it, out of the juices of meat and game, good amorous chyle, good hot, quick blood, and to maintain it in a condition to give pleasure to charitable souls.

After breakfast, while picking my teeth, I should have woven together some quaint lines, cast in the mould of a sonnet, in honour of my princess, discovering many a comparison, each more novel than the others and infinitely gallant. In the first quatrain, a dance of the suns; in the second, a minuet performed by the cardinal virtues; nor would the terzetti have been inferior in taste; Helen would have been described as a tavern wench, and Paris as an idiot; the East could not have surpassed the gorgeousness of my metaphors, and the last line would have been peculiarly admirable, containing at least two concetti to every

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syllable; for the sting of the scorpion is in its tail, and the value of a sonnet lies in the closing line. The sonnet thoroughly perfected, and well and duly transcribed on cream-laid, scented paper, I should have gone forth one hundred cubits tall, and bowing my head lest I struck the heavens and brought down the clouds (a wise precaution), and I should have gone to recite my latest performance to all my friends and foes, then to babes and sucklings, and to their nurses, then to horses and apes, to trees and walls, so as to get some inkling of what creation thought of this most recent product of my inspiration.

In the drawing-rooms I should have spoken with the ladies with a most learned air, and maintained sentimental theories in a grave and measured tone of voice, like a man who knows infinitely more than he cares to say on the matter in hand, and whose learning is not derived from books. This never fails to produce an amazing effect, and causes all the ladies of an uncertain age present — as well as the few little girls who have not been asked to dance — to gasp like fish out of water.

I could have led the happiest of lives, trod on the pug's tail without making its mistress scream over-

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much, upset tables laden with china, eaten up the best dish at table and left none for any one else, and all would have been excused on the ground of a lover's well-known absent-mindedness. People seeing me swallow everything with a distracted look on my face, would have clasped their hands and said, "Poor fellow!"

Then the sad, dreamy look, the woebegone hair, the wrinkled stockings, the badly tied cravat, the long arms hanging down, I should have indulged in! And how I should have travelled along the park walks, sometimes striding, sometimes with mincing steps, like a man who has lost his wits! And how I should have stared at the moon, and spat into the water in perfect peace!

But the gods ordered otherwise.

I have fallen in love with a beauty in doublet and long boots, with a proud Bradamante who disdains the apparel of her sex and plunges you at times into the most parlous perplexity. Her features and her form are of a verity the form and features of a woman, but her mind is unquestionably virile.

My mistress is a first-class swordswoman, and could give points to the most experienced professor of fencing; she has fought I know not how many duels, and has killed or wounded three or four men. She can

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leap her horse across a ten-foot ditch, and hunts like an old country squire; which are extraordinary acquirements for one's lady-love to possess. But that is always the way with me.

Though I laugh, it is no laughing matter, for never have I suffered so much, and the last two months seemed two years, nay, two centuries to me. A constant ebb and flow of uncertainty, fit to reduce the strongest brain to idiocy, rose and fell in my head; I was so fiercely agitated and dragged hither and thither, I was a prey to such mad impulses, such complete atony, such extravagant hopes and deep despair, that I fail to understand why I did not sink under the burden. That one thought so filled, so engrossed me that I wonder it was not as plainly visible through my earthly frame as a candle in a lantern; and I was in mortal terror lest any one should discover the object of my insensate love. Yet Rosette, who was most deeply interested in observing the movements of my heart, does not seem to have noticed anything; I believe she herself was too much engrossed with love for Theodore to mark my growing coolness towards herself, or else I am a past master of dissimulation, and I am not conceited enough to believe that. Until to-day Theodore

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himself has not exhibited the least sign of suspecting the state of my feelings, and he has always talked to me in the familiar and friendly way of a well-bred young man to a young man of his own age, but nothing more. Our talk turned indifferently upon all sorts of subjects, on art, poetry, and kindred topics, but never on anything intimate or direct that might refer to him or to me.

Perhaps the reasons which compelled him to adopt his disguise no longer exist, and he will soon resume his proper habiliments. I know not, but this is certain, that Rosalind spoke certain words with a peculiar inflection, and that she dwelt in very marked fashion upon all the lines in her part which had a double meaning and which might be taken in that particular sense.

In the meeting scene, from the moment when she reproaches Orlando for not having come two hours earlier, as beseems a man truly in love, instead of two hours later, until the dolorous sigh she utters as, terrified at the violence of her passion, she throws herself into Aliena's arms, — "O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love!" — she displayed miraculous talent,

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mingling irresistibly tenderness, melancholy, and love. Her voice trembled with emotion, and one felt that her laugh concealed the most passionate love on the point of breaking forth. Add to all this the piquancy and singularity of the transposition and the novelty of seeing a young man pay court to his mistress whom he takes for a youth, and who has all the outward appearance of being so.

Expressions which would have been ordinary and commonplace in other situations, became striking under these circumstances, and all that current stage coin of amorous comparisons and protestations seemed to have passed afresh through the mint. Besides, even had the thoughts, instead of being as delicate and charming as they are, been worn more threadbare than a judge's robe or the saddle-cloth of an ass standing for hire, the fashion in which they were spoken would have imparted to them the most excellent wit and taste.

I forgot to tell you that Rosette, after having refused to play Rosalind, had kindly undertaken the subordinate part of Phebe, a shepherdess in the forest of Arden, madly loved by Silvius, a shepherd, whom she cannot tolerate and whom she overwhelms with her coldness. Phebe is icy as the moon, whose name

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she bears; her heart is of snow, that melts not in the breath of the most ardent sighs, but the frozen crust of which thickens more and more and becomes hard as adamant. Scarcely, however, has she beheld Rosalind under the apparel of the handsome page Ganymede than the ice melts into tears and the diamond becomes softer than wax. Proud Phebe, who laughed at love, is herself in love, and now endures the torments she inflicted upon others. She sinks her pride to the point of making all the advances, and sends to Rosalind, by poor Silvius, a burning letter containing the avowal of her passion couched in the humblest and most suppliant terms. Rosalind, pitying Silvius, and having, besides, the best reasons in the world not to return Phebe's love, subjects her to the harshest treatment and laughs at her with unparalleled cruelty and persistency. Nevertheless, Phebe prefers these insults to the daintiest and most passionate madrigals of her unhappy swain; she follows the handsome stranger everywhere, and by dint of importunities obtains the poor promise that if he ever wed with woman she shall certainly be the chosen one; meanwhile, he advises her to treat Silvius decently and not to deceive herself with too flattering a hope.

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Rosette played her part with a mournful, caressing grace, and spoke in a pained and resigned tone that went to the heart; and when Rosalind said to her, "I would love you, if I could," the tears nearly welled from her eyes, and she found it difficult to restrain them, for Phebe's story is hers, as Orlando's is mine, saving this difference, that all ends happily for Orlando, while Phebe, deceived in her love, is reduced to wed Silvius, instead of the lovely ideal she sought to embrace. Such is life; one man's happiness is another man's curse. It is lucky for me that Theodore is a woman and very unfortunate for Rosette that he is not a man, for she is now stranded amid the love impossibilities by which I was but recently beset.

At the end of the play Rosalind exchanges the doublet of Ganymede the page for the garments proper to her sex, and makes herself known to the duke as his daughter, to Orlando as his mistress, and the god Hymen arrives with his saffron liveries and his legitimising torches. Three weddings take place: Orlando weds Rosalind; Phebe, Silvius; and Touchstone the clown, Audrey the simple wench. Then the epilogue speaks its farewell and the curtain falls.

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The whole thing interested and enthralled us greatly. It was in some sort a play within a play, a drama invisible and unknown to the other spectators, which we were playing for ourselves alone, and which, with its symbolical expressions, summed up our whole life and expressed our most secret desires. But for Rosalind's curious remedy, I should be worse than ever, without even the hope of a distant cure, and I should continue to wander sadly in the oblique paths of the dark forest.

I am, however, merely morally certain. I have no proofs, and cannot longer remain in this state of uncertainty. I must at all costs speak more directly to Theodore. A score of times I have gone up to him with a phrase ready prepared and have been unable to utter it. I dare not. I have opportunities enough to speak to him alone, either in the park, in my room, or in his, for he calls on me and I on him, but I let them slip without turning them to account, although the very next minute I bitterly regret it and rage at myself. I open my lips, and in spite of myself other words replace the words I would say; instead of telling my love, I prose about the weather or some such idiotic nonsense. Meanwhile the season draws to a

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close, and soon all will return to town; the opportunities I enjoy here I shall not again have; we shall lose sight of each other and contrary currents will no doubt carry us away.

The freedom of the country is most delightful and convenient. The trees, even somewhat stripped of their leaves by the autumn, offer such delicious shades to the reveries of nascent love. It is difficult to resist when in the bosom of fair nature; so languorous is the song of birds, so intoxicating the scent of flowers, so golden and shining is the sward on the hill-slopes. Solitude suggests innumerable voluptuous thoughts that would vanish in the whirl of society or fly here and there, and two beings who are listening to the beating of their own hearts in the loneliness and silence of the country are naturally moved to clasp each other more closely, as if they were indeed the only living beings on earth.

I strolled out this morning; the air was soft and moist, there was not a patch of blue visible in the heavens, and yet they were neither sombre nor menacing. Two or three pearly tints, melting harmoniously one into another, bathed the whole extent of sky, and over this vaporous background slowly drifted white

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clouds like great masses of wool, driven by the dying breath of a light air scarce sufficient to move the tops of the most quivering of aspens; the course of the stream was marked by the wisps of mist that rose between the great horse-chestnut trees. When the air freshened, a few reddened and browned leaves would scatter tremblingly and fly before me like flocks of frightened sparrows; then, as it died away again, they fluttered to earth a few yards farther on, — apt emblems of those spirits mistaken for birds flying free on the wing, which are, after all, but leaves killed by the morning frost, and which become the playthings of the first breath of wind that blows their way.

The distance was so softened by haze, and the edges of the horizon so dimmed, that it was hard to tell exactly where earth ended and the sky began; only a slightly more opaque greyness, a somewhat denser haze suggested vaguely the distance and the difference between the various stretches. Through this veil, the willows, with their ashen-coloured tops, looked more like the ghosts of trees than like real trees; the outlines of the hills resembled more the undulations of cloudy masses than solid ground. The contours of objects were tremulous, and an inexpressibly tenuous,

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cobweb-like grey veil hung between the foreground of the landscape and the distant prospect; in the darker parts, the lines stood out much more plainly, and allowed the meshes of the web to become visible; in the high lights the wisp of mist was invisible, and lost itself in a diffused luminosity. The air had a drowsy, moist, warm, soft, undecided feel about it, which greatly conduced to melancholy.

As I walked I reflected that autumn had come upon me also, and that the radiant summer had gone, never to return. The tree of my soul was even barer, perhaps, than the trees of the forest, and scarce did there remain on the highest branch a single little green leaflet, swaying and quivering, saddened at seeing its sisters leave it one by one.

Remain on the tree, thou little leaf, the colour of hope; cling to the branch with all the strength of thy fibres and thy markings; be not dismayed by the whistling of the wind, O dear little leaf! for when thou too shalt have left me who shall tell whether I am a dead or a living tree, and who shall stay the woodman's axe from cutting me down and making faggots out of my branches? The time has not yet come when the trees are bare of leaves,

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and the sun may yet emerge from the folds of mist that envelop it.

The sight of the dying season impressed me deeply. I reflected that time was flying swiftly, and that death might overtake me ere I could press my ideal to my heart.

On returning to my room I made up my mind. Since I could not bring myself to speak, I wrote my fate on a square of paper. It is ridiculous, mayhap, to write to one who lives in the same house with you and whom you may see every day and at any time, but I have got past thinking of what is or is not ridiculous.

I sealed my letter, not without trembling and turning pale; then, choosing the time when Theodore had gone out, I placed it in the centre of the table and fled, as much agitated as if I had just committed the vilest of deeds.

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XII

I PROMISED to tell you the rest of my adventures, but I am such a poor hand at letter-writing that if I did not love you as the apple of mine eye, and did not know you to be as full of curiosity as Eve or Psyche, I could not bring myself to sit down to a table with a great sheet of white paper which I must blacken all over, and an inkstand deeper than the sea, every drop of ink in which is to be transmuted into thoughts, or at least into something resembling thoughts, and not suddenly resolve to mount and ride the eighty long leagues, more or less, which separate us, in order to tell you by word of mouth what I am going to put down in microscopic scratchings, so that the prodigious magnitude of my picaresque Odyssey may not terrify me.

Eighty leagues; to think there is all that distance between me and the being I love best on earth! I have a great mind to tear up my letter and to have my horse saddled. But I forgot — under the costume I wear I could not be near you and resume the familiar life we led together when we were artless and

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innocent little girls. If ever I go back to petticoats, it will be for that reason.

I left off, if I remember right, just as I was leaving the inn where I spent such a funny night, and where my virtue was nearly wrecked as it was leaving port. We all started together, going in the same direction. My companions were loud in their praises of my horse, which is, as a matter of fact, a thorough-bred, and of the swiftest. I rose a foot at least in their good opinion, and the merit of my steed was added to my own. They appeared to fear, however, that it would prove too spirited and hot-tempered for me. I told them they might dismiss their fears, and, to show them there was no danger, I made my horse perform several curvets; then I leapt a pretty high fence and galloped off.

The company tried in vain to keep up with me. I turned back when I was sufficiently ahead, and rode at full speed to meet them. When I was close to them, I pulled up my horse on his four feet and stopped him short, which, as you know or do not know, is a regular feat of horsemanship.

They passed without transition from esteem to the deepest respect. They had not suspected that a

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youth fresh from the university could be such a good horseman. This discovery did me more good with them than if they had found out I possessed every one of the theological and of the cardinal virtues; instead of treating me as a boy, they adopted a tone of obsequious familiarity which pleased me.

I had not dropped my pride with my petticoats. Having ceased to be a woman, I wished to be a man all over, and not merely externally. I was resolved upon winning in the guise of a man the triumphs I could no longer pretend to as a woman. What troubled me most was to know how I should manage to be brave, for courage and skill at bodily exercises are the means which enable a man to make a reputation most quickly. For a woman I am not timid, and I do not suffer from that stupid pusillanimity observed in many of our sex; but between that and the careless, ferocious brutality in which men glory, there is a long way. Now my intention was to become a small swashbuckler, a Bombastes Furioso like our gentlemen of fashion, so that I might be on a good footing in society and enjoy all the benefits of my metamorphosis.

Later on, however, I saw that nothing was easier, and that the recipe is a very simple one.

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I shall not tell you, after the manner of travellers, that I rode so many miles one day, that I went from this place to that, that the roast I ate at the White Horse or the Iron Cross was underdone or overdone, that the wine was sour, and that the bed in which I slept had curtains on which were figured people or flowers; these be very important details, which it is well to preserve for posterity, but posterity will have to do without them this time, and you will have to be satisfied not to know how many courses I had at dinner, and whether I slept ill or well during my travels. Nor shall I treat you to an accurate description of the various landscapes, corn-fields, forests, divers crops, and hamlet-strewn hills which passed successively before mine eyes; you can readily imagine all these things. Take a little earth, stick in a few trees and blades of grass, dash off behind that a bit of greyish or pale-blue sky, and you will have a very good idea of the moving background against which showed our little caravan. I beg you to forgive my having indulged in some details of this sort in my first letter; I shall not do it again; never having been out before, the smallest trifles seemed important to me.

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One of the company, my bed-fellow, the one whose sleeve I so nearly pulled on that memorable night the anxious moments in which I have fully described to you, took a great liking to me and constantly kept his horse near mine.

Bar the fact that I would not have had him for a lover, even had he laid at my feet the finest realm in the world, I had no dislike to him. He was well educated and lacked neither wit nor good temper; only, when he spoke about women it was in a tone of such contempt and irony that I would willingly have scratched out both his eyes, and the more willingly that, notwithstanding the exaggeration, he said many very true things which my male costume compelled me to admit were just.

He pressed me so much to come and visit with him a sister of his who was just coming out of mourning for her husband, and who was then living in an old *château* with one of her aunts, that I could not refuse. I made some objections for form's sake, but at bottom it was a matter of indifference to me whether I went there or elsewhere, for I could compass my ends just as readily in this way as in any other; and as he said that I would pain him greatly if I did not give him at

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least a fortnight, I replied that I was quite willing to do so, and the matter was settled.

At a fork of the road my companion, pointing to the right branch of this natural Y said, "That is the way." We shook hands with the other members of the company, who rode on in the other direction.

After a few hours' ride we reached our destination. A fairly wide moat, filled, instead of water, with an abundant and luxurious vegetable growth, divided the park from the highroad; the revetment wall was of dressed stone, and from the angles projected gigantic iron artichokes and thistles, which seemed to have sprouted like real plants between the joints of the blocks forming the wall. A small bridge of a single arch spanned this dry moat and gave access to the entrance gates.

We entered an avenue of tall elms, arched like an arbour and trimmed in old-fashioned style; after having followed it for some time we debouched into a sort of round-point.

The trees seemed old-fashioned rather than old, and looked as if bewigged and powdered white. Only a small tuft of foliage at the very top had been preserved; all the rest had been carefully pruned, so

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that they looked like huge feather-dusters planted at intervals.

After traversing the round-point, covered with a fine sward carefully rolled, we had to pass under a curious tree architecture adorned with firepots, pyramids, and columns of the rustic order, all produced by the lavish use of shears and bill-books in a huge clump of woods. Through cuttings here and there we perceived, now to the right, now to the left, sometimes a half ruinous rocaille mansion, sometimes the moss-grown steps of a dried up waterfall, or a vase, or a statue representing a nymph or a shepherd, nose and fingers gone, and occasionally pigeons perched on the shoulder or the head.

A great flower-garden, laid out in the French fashion, spread before the mansion. The various beds were bordered with box or holly, with uncompromising regularity, and made it look as much like a carpet as a garden. Tall flowers in full dress, majestic in port and serene of mien, like duchesses about to walk a minuet, gently bowed their heads as we passed. Others, less polite apparently, remained stiff and motionless like dowagers working at a tapestry. Shrubs of every possible shape, save and except their natural one, round,

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square, pointed, triangular, in grey and green boxes, seemed to walk in procession along the great avenue and to lead you by the hand to the first steps of the outside staircase.

A few turrets, partially inclosed in more recent parts, broke the sky line of the building with the full height of their pointed slate-roofs, while their vanes, cut in swallow-tail shape, testified to a respectable antiquity. The windows of the centre block of the building all opened upon one long balcony ornamented with an iron balustrade richly wrought, and the others were framed in stone adorned with carved monograms and knots.

Four or five huge dogs rushed at us, barking loudly and leaping in prodigious fashion. They gambolled around the horses and jumped at their heads, paying special attention to my companion's steed, which, no doubt, they often visited in the stable or accompanied on rides.

The noise at last brought out a sort of servant, looking half like a peasant and half like an hostler, who took our horses and led them off. I had not yet seen a living soul, save a little peasant-girl, as shy and wild as a deer, who had bolted at sight of us and hidden in

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a furrow behind some hemp, although we repeatedly called to her and did our best to reassure her.

There was not a soul at any of the windows; the mansion seemed to be uninhabited or tenanted by ghosts only, for not a sound was audible from outside.

We were just climbing the first few steps of the outer stair, our spurs clanking, our legs being somewhat stiff, when we heard within the sound of doors opening and shutting, as if some one were hastening to meet us. In another moment, indeed, a young woman appeared at the top of the steps, bounded across the space which separated her from my companion, and threw herself on his neck. He embraced her very affectionately and clasping her round the waist he almost lifted her up and carried her thus to the top.

"You are a very gallant and amiable brother, dear Alcibiades. I may as well tell you, sir, that he is my brother, for his ways are rather more than brotherly," said the young beauty turning towards me.

Whereto I replied that it was plain enough he was, and that it was somewhat of a misfortune to be a brother to her, as one was thereby excluded from the category of her admirers; that were I her brother I should be at one and the same time the happiest and

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the most wretched man on earth; whereupon she smiled gently.

While talking thus we entered a room on the ground-floor the walls of which were hung with Flanders tapestry. Great trees with pointed leaves harboured swarms of fantastic birds; the fading of the colours, due to time, had caused some curious transpositions of tints, the sky was green, the trees royal blue with the high lights in yellow, and the shadows of the draperies of the figures were frequently of a colour contrasting with that of the dress itself; the flesh tints looked like wood, and the nymphs wandering in the forest like mummies after they have been unwrapped; their lips alone, the red of which had preserved its original tint, smiled in somewhat life-like fashion. In the foreground rose up tall, straight plants of a peculiar green with big multi-coloured blooms, the pistils of which resembled peacocks' aigrettes. Serious, thoughtful-looking herons, their heads sunk between their shoulders, their long beaks resting on their swelling breasts, stood philosophically on one of their thin legs, in black, sleepy water with streaks like dull silver. Through the openings in the trees one caught sight in the distance of tiny *châteaux* with pointed-roofed turrets and

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balconies full of fine ladies in fine clothes who were watching processions or hunting parties go by.

Rockeries with quaint outlines, from which fell torrents worked in white wool, were not easily distinguished from the dappled clouds on the horizon.

One thing particularly struck me. It was a huntress shooting at a bird. Her parted fingers had just loosed the cord of the bow, and the arrow had flown, but as this portion of the tapestry happened to be in a corner, the arrow was on the other side of the wall and formed a sharp angle. As for the bird it was flying with motionless wings, and seemed to be making for a near-by bough.

This feathered, gold-barbed arrow, always in the air and never reaching what it was aimed at, produced the queerest effect, and seemed like a sad and painful symbol of human destiny; the longer I gazed at it, the more I found in it a mysterious and sinister meaning. There stood the huntress, one foot forward, the knee bent, her eye, with its silken eyelids wide open, yet unable to see her arrow gone from its path direct; she seemed to be anxiously looking for the bird with the multi-coloured wings that she was trying to bring down and that she expected to see fall at her feet, shot

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through and through. I know not whether it was merely a fancy of mine, but I saw in her face an expression as woebegone and desperate as that of a poet removed by death before he has written the work on which he reckoned to make his reputation, and whom the death-rattle seizes upon at the moment he is trying to dictate.

I am telling you a good deal about this tapestry, a great deal more unquestionably than it is worth, but the fantastic world called into being by the weavers of tapestry has always strangely interested me. I am passionately fond of that fanciful vegetation, of those flowers and plants which are not to be found on earth, of those forests of unknown trees in which wander unicorns and goats, and milk-white stags with a golden crucifix between their antlers are invariably pursued by red-bearded hunters dressed in Saracen costume.

When I was a child I could scarcely ever enter a room hung with tapestry without a shudder, and I hardly dared move about in it. Those figures standing against the wall, which the waving of the arras and the fire-light endowed with a sort of fantastic life, were to me so many spies busy watching what I was doing in order to report it at the proper time and

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place, and I would never have dared to eat a purloined apple or cake in their presence.

How many things these serious personages could tell if they could open their red-thread mouths, and if sounds could penetrate the shell of their embroidered ears. Of how many murders, treasons, infamous adulteries, and abominations of all sorts have they not been silent and impassible witnesses!

But let me drop the tapestry and return to my tale.

"I shall let aunt know you have come, Alcibiades."

"No hurry for that, sister; let us sit down first and have a chat. I present to you this gentleman, Theodore de Sérannes by name, who is going to spend some time with us. I need not beg you to welcome him — he is his own best recommendation." (I am merely registering his own words; do not hastily accuse me of being conceited.)

The beauty nodded in assent, and we turned to other topics. While we talked I looked her over carefully and examined her more attentively than I had yet had opportunity to do.

She looked to be twenty-three to twenty-four, and her mourning became her uncommonly well. To tell

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the truth, she did not seem very much cast down or afflicted, and I question whether she had eaten the ashes of her Mausoleus in her soup by way of rhubarb. I do not know whether she had wept copiously over her dead spouse; if she had there was but slight trace of it, and the pretty cambric handkerchief she held in her hand was as dry as a bone. Her eyes were not red; on the contrary, they were as bright and clear as possible, and you would have looked in vain on her cheeks for the furrow traced by her tears. In point of fact there were only two little dimples, due to a habit of smiling, and, for a widow, I am bound to say she very often allowed her teeth to be seen, — by no means an unpleasant sight either, for they were small and beautifully regular. She at once gained my good opinion because she had not thought it necessary, in consequence of the death of that husband of hers, to indulge in sunken eyes and a red nose; I was also grateful to her for not putting on sorrowful airs and for speaking naturally with her sonorous silvery voice, without dragging the words and interjecting virtuous sighs into her sentences. This struck me as being in good taste, and I put her down forthwith as a clever woman, and this she is in fact.

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She is well made, with pretty hands and feet; she wore her black costume so coquettishly and so brightly that the gloom of the colour wholly vanished. She might have gone to a ball dressed as she then was, and nobody would have thought it strange. If I ever marry and become a widow, I shall ask her for the pattern of her dress, for it becomes her divinely.

After chatting a short time, we went up to the old aunt's room, and found her seated in a big arm-chair with sloping back, a small footstool under her feet, and by her side an old blear-eyed dog, which put up its black nose as we came in and received us with a most unfriendly growl.

I have never been able to look at old women without a feeling of horror. My own mother died when quite young; no doubt, if I had seen her grow old gradually, and had seen her features undergo an imperceptible deformation, I should have quietly got used to it. During my childhood I had around me only young and blooming faces, so that I have preserved an insurmountable antipathy to old people. When, therefore, the handsome widow pressed her sweet ruby lips to the parchment forehead of the old lady, I shuddered. I could not possibly do it. I know I shall be just

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like that old woman when I am sixty; all the same, I cannot help it, and I pray God I may die young, as did my mother.

Yet this old lady had preserved from the wreck of her former beauty some simple, majestic traits which prevented her having that dried-apple ugliness which falls to the share of women who have been pretty or blooming only. Her eyes, though marked with crow-feet at the corners, and with heavy, falling eyelids, yet sparkled with something of their pristine fire, and it was easy to see that in the late king's reign they must have flashed the most dazzling glances. Her thin, delicate nose, shaped somewhat like the beak of a bird of prey, imparted to her profile a serious grandeur, tempered by the indulgent smile of her aristocratic lips, touched with carmine in the fashion of the last century.

Her dress was of another age without being ridiculous, and in perfect harmony with her face. Her head-dress consisted of a plain white cap with an edging of lace; her long, thin hands, which still showed how beautiful they had been, emerged from fingerless mittens; a dress, leaf-brown in colour, and with brocaded design in a darker shade, a black

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mantilla, and a silk apron, of changing colours, completed her attire.

Old ladies should always dress in that way and have respect enough for their approaching demise not to cover themselves with feathers, wreaths of flowers, delicate-hued ribbons, and countless adornments which are suited to high youth alone. It is in vain they court life — it will have none of them ; they are wasting their pains, like aged courtesans who paint and rouge, and whom drunken muleteers kick into the gutter with an oath.

The old lady received us with that exquisite ease of manner and politeness which have fallen to the share of those who formed part of the former court, and the secret of which appears to be dying out day by day, like so many other valuable secrets, and with a voice which, though broken and quavering, was still passing sweet.

She seemed to take a great fancy to me and looked at me long and very attentively with a look of deep emotion. A tear glistened in her eye and fell slowly into one of her wrinkles where it disappeared and dried up. She begged me to excuse her, saying that I was very like a boy of hers, who had been killed in battle.

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During the whole of my stay in the house I was, thanks to this real or fancied likeness, treated by the good lady with the most extraordinary and motherly kindness. It gave me greater pleasure than I could have believed at the outset; for the greatest favour old people can do me is never to speak to me and to leave when I arrive.

I shall not relate to you in detail my doings from day to day at R——. If I have dwelt at some length upon this earlier part and taken some pains to draw these two or three portraits of people and descriptions of places, it is because I have had some very strange, though very natural experiences, that I ought to have foreseen when I adopted a manly garb.

My natural heedlessness led me to commit an imprudent mistake which I bitterly regret; for it has caused pain to a dear and lovely woman, — pain which I cannot allay without revealing who I am and compromising myself seriously.

In order to play perfectly my part as a man, and also to have some fun, it occurred to me to pay court to my friend's sister. It struck me as extraordinarily funny to throw myself on all-fours when she dropped her glove and to return it to her with low bows; to

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bend over the back of her chair with the most delightfully lovesick look, and to whisper in her ear endless charming compliments. Whenever she desired to pass into another room, I gracefully offered my hand; if she rode out, I held her stirrup and after starting I kept constantly close to her side; in the evening I read to her and sang with her, — in a word, I fulfilled most scrupulously the duty of a *cavaliere servente*.

I imitated every expression I had seen on lovers' faces, which caused me deep delight and made me laugh like the madcap I am, once I was alone in my room and recalled all the impertinent nonsense I had just been talking in the gravest way.

Alcibiades and the old marchioness appeared to be pleased with our intimacy and very often left us alone together. Sometimes I positively regretted not being a man, so that I might turn my opportunities to better account. Had I been a man I could have had my way with her, for the lovely widow seemed to have quite forgotten the late lamented, or, if she remembered him she was perfectly willing to be unfaithful to his memory.

Having started on this tack I could not decently draw back, and an honourable retreat would have been

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very difficult to effect. On the other hand, I could not go beyond a certain point, and my love-making had perforce to be confined to pretty speeches. I hoped thus to reach the end of the month I was to spend at R——, and to leave after promising to return, a promise I would not have kept. I believed that once I was gone my beauty would console herself, and that when I was out of sight I should soon be out of mind.

But my trifling had awakened a serious love, and matters turned out very differently; a proof of a truth well known from olden times, namely, that one must never play with fire or love.

Rosette had not known what it is to love before she met me. Married, when very young, to a man greatly her senior, all she had felt for him was a sort of filial affection. Of course she had been courted, but she had had no lover, strange as it may seem, for either the gallants who had paid attention to her were not very seductive or, which is more likely, her hour had not yet come. The country squires and bumpkins whose whole talk turned on fumets and leashes, punches and antlers, hornblowings and stags of ten tines, with a mixture of charades learned from almanacs and of

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moss-eaten madrigals, were unquestionably scarce fitted to commend themselves to her, and her virtue had not been compelled to make much of a fight in self-defence. Besides, the brightness and the natural playfulness of her character sufficiently protected her against love, that tender passion which has such a hold on dreamers and melancholy people. The experience of voluptuousness she had gone through with her aged Tithonus must have given her so poor an idea of it as not to tempt her greatly to taste it again, and she therefore enjoyed quietly the pleasure of being a widow at an early age, and of having many a year of loveliness still before her.

But my coming brought about a great change. At first I believed that had I kept, in my intercourse with her, within the narrow bounds of cool and precise courtesy, she would not have paid any particular attention to me. Later, however, I was forced to the conclusion that this would have made no difference, and that my assumption, though distinctly modest, was absolutely gratuitous. Alas! nothing can ward off the fatal ascendency and no one can avoid the beneficent or malevolent influence of his star.

Rosette was fated to love but once in her life, and

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to feel an impossible love; she must fulfil her fate and will fulfil it.

I have been loved, O Graciosa! and it is most sweet, though it has been by a woman only, and though in this misguided love there enters an element of pain which is not to be met with in the other — oh! a most sweet thing. When you awake at night and raise yourself on your elbow, it is fine to be able to say to yourself: "Some one thinks or dreams of me; is interested in my life; a single motion of my eyes or my lips makes some one else sad or happy; a word dropped by chance by me is treasured, commented upon, turned over for hours at a time. I am the pole to which turns a restless needle; my eyes are her heaven, my lips a paradise more desired than God's. If death overtakes me, hot tears will warm my ashes; my tomb will be covered with more flowers than are given to a bride. Should danger threaten me, some one would throw herself between my breast and the sword's point; she would die for me." I know not what more can be wished for in this world.

I reproached myself for taking pleasure in these thoughts, for I had nothing to give in return. I was in the position of a poor person who accepts presents

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from a rich and generous friend, without hope of ever being able to make any in return. I was charmed at being loved thus, and at times I let myself be loved with a feeling of marked complacency. By dint of hearing every one say "sir" to me, and of being treated as a man, I was little by little forgetting that I am a woman. My disguise seemed to be my proper apparel, and I could not remember ever having worn any other; I was forgetting that after all I was only an empty-headed young woman who had turned her needle into a sword and one of her skirts into a pair of breeches.

There are many men who are more of a woman than I. About all the femininity about me consists of my bosoms, a few softer contours, and more delicate hands. My skirts hang on my hips, but do not affect my spirit. It is often the case that the sex of the spirit is unlike that of the body, a contradiction which cannot fail to cause much trouble. As regards myself, for instance, had I not decided — foolishly as far as appearances went, but very wisely as a matter of fact — to give up the apparel of a sex to which I chance to belong, and only so far as physical conformation goes, I should have been very unhappy. I am fond of

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horses, arms, and physical exercises; I like to climb and run at will like a boy; it bores me to death to sit still, my feet close together, elbows kept close to the side, to look down modestly, to speak in a flute-like, honeyed voice, and to pass a bit of wool ten million times through the holes of a piece of embroidery canvas. I am not in the least fond of obeying, and the words I utter most frequently are, "I will this or that."

Under my smooth brow and my silken hair stir strong and manly thoughts. All the finicky nonsense which usually delights women has never made much impression upon me, and like Achilles disguised as a girl, I would willingly throw aside the mirror for the sword. The only thing I like in women is their beauty. In spite of the inconveniences which result from it, I would not willingly give up my shape, ill assorted though it is to the mind it contains.

An intrigue of this sort has something new and piquant about it, and I would have greatly enjoyed it, had it not been taken seriously by poor Rosette. She took to loving me with all the artlessness and earnestness, with all the strength of her beautiful, kind soul; with a love that men do not understand and of which

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they cannot have the faintest idea : delicately, ardently, as I should like to be loved, and as I shall love, if I ever realise my dream. What a splendid treasure is thus wasted ! What white, transparent pearls, such as divers will never find in the jewel-case of the ocean ! What soft breathings, what gentle sighs wafted through the air, which might have been gathered by pure and loving lips ! Her passion might have made a young fellow so happy. So many handsome, charming, well-endowed, unfortunate men, brave and clever, have in vain prayed on their knees to insensible and cold idols ! So many tender and kind souls have cast themselves in despair into the arms of courtesans, or have silently died out like lamps in a tomb, who might have been saved from debauch and death by true love ! How strange is human destiny, and how sarcastic is chance ! What so many others had ardently desired had come to me who did not and could not care for it. A capricious girl takes it into her head to travel in male apparel to find out something about her future lovers. She sleeps in an inn with a good brother who takes her by the hand to his sister ; and the latter immediately falls passionately in love with her, like a cat, like a dove, like whatever there is of passionate and languorous in

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the world. It is quite plain that if I had been a young man, and all this might have been of some use to me, things would have been quite different, and the lady would have taken a hearty dislike to me. Fortune is rather fond of presenting wooden-legged men with slippers and giving pairs of gloves to those who have no hands. A legacy which would have enabled you to live in comfort usually comes to you on the day of your death.

I occasionally went — not as often as she would have liked — to pay a visit to Rosette in her bedroom. Although she usually received only when dressed, nevertheless in my case she overlooked that point. She would have overlooked a good many other things had I chosen; but, as the proverb says, "The handsomest girl can give only what she has," and what I had could not have been of much use to Rosette.

She would hold out her little hand to me to kiss. I confess that I took a certain pleasure in kissing it, for it is a very smooth, white, exquisitely perfumed hand, and with a feeling of warm, fresh softness. I felt it quiver and contract under my lips, the pressure of which I slyly prolonged. Then Rosette, much moved and with a beseeching look, would turn upon me her

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great eyes filled with voluptuousness and aglow with a moist, transparent light, and let fall upon the pillow her pretty head, which she had raised a little to receive me.

I could see her troubled bosom flutter under the sheet, and her whole body strangely agitated. Certainly any one capable of daring might have dared much; she would have been grateful for his boldness, and would have been satisfied to skip some chapters of the novel.

I would remain there an hour or two with her, still holding her hand, which I placed upon the coverlet. We talked delightfully and at much length, for although Rosette was greatly preoccupied by her love, she felt herself too sure of success not to preserve almost all her freedom of mind and her playfulness. From time to time only did her passion cast over her gaiety a transparent veil of gentle melancholy which rendered it still more piquant.

And, in fact, it would have been incredible that a young fellow starting in the world — and that is what I seemed to be — should not consider himself lucky at having such a fortunate chance, and should not profit to the utmost by it. For Rosette indeed was not one

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who was likely to meet with great coldness, and knowing no more than she did concerning me, she reckoned on her charms and on my youth, even if love were to be lacking on my part.

However, as this situation was being unnaturally prolonged, she became somewhat uneasy, and the increase of flattering phrases and of fine protestations I indulged in scarce sufficed to restore to her her former sense of security. Two things amazed her in me, and she remarked them as contradictions which she could not reconcile, — the warmth of my speech and the coolness of my conduct.

Better than any one, my dear Graciosa, you know that my friendship has all the characteristics of the passion of love. It is sudden, ardent, quick, exclusive; it has of love even its jealousy; and I felt for Rosette a friendship almost like that which I bear to you. She might easily have been deceived with even less, and she was the more thoroughly deceived that the clothes I wore scarcely permitted her entertaining any other idea.

As I have not yet loved any man, the excess of my tenderness has, in a way, flowed over into my friendships with girls and young women. These have been

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marked by the same violence and the same enthusiasm which characterise everything I do, it being impossible for me to be moderate in anything, and especially in matters of the heart. For me there are but two classes of people, — those I adore and those I execrate. The others are to me as if they were not, and I would ride over them as I would ride on the highroad. In my mind there is no difference between them and paving-stones and posts.

I am naturally expansive, and I have most caressing manners. Sometimes — forgetting the consequences of such demonstrations — I would, while walking with Rosette, pass my arm around her waist, as I used to do when you and I strolled together down that solitary walk at the end of uncle's garden ; or else, bending over the back of her arm-chair while she was embroidering, I would curl on my fingers the stray hairs which played upon her round, plump neck, or I would smooth with my hand her beautiful locks drawn close by the comb and make them shine again, or I would indulge in some of those fond ways which you know to be habitual with me when I am with my dear friends.

She had no thought of ascribing those caresses to mere friendship, — since friendship, as usually under-

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stood, does not go so far; but seeing that I went no farther, she was inwardly astonished and knew not what to think. She came to the conclusion that my reserve was due to overmuch timidity on my part, arising from my extreme youth and from the want of habit of love affairs, and that I needed to be encouraged by all sorts of advances and kindnesses.

Consequently she took care to manage many opportunities for *tête-à-têtes* in places likely to embolden me by their solitude and their distance from any sound and any importunate intruder. She made me take several walks through the woods to see whether the voluptuous reverie and the love desires inspired in sentimental souls by the thick and propitious shade of the forest might not be turned to account.

One day, after having made me wander for a long time through a very picturesque park which extends far at the back of the mansion, and of which I knew but the portion near the buildings, she led me by a narrow path capriciously twisting about and bordered with elders and hazels, to a rustic hut, a sort of charcoal-burner's hut, built of logs placed crosswise, with a thatched roof and a door roughly made out of five or six planks scarcely planed, the interstices between which

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were filled with mosses and wild plants. Close by, between the moss-grown roots of the great, silvery-barked ash-trees, spotted here and there with black stains, flowed an abundant spring which, a few paces farther, rippled down two marble steps into a basin filled with cress greener than emerald. In the places where the cress did not grow there was sand, fine and white as snow. The water was crystal clear, and ice cold. Issuing, as it did, suddenly from the ground, and never touched by the faintest sunbeam under the impenetrable shade, it had not time to grow warm or muddy. In spite of its crudity I like spring water, and seeing this was limpid, I could not resist the desire to drink. I bent down and dipped some up repeatedly in the hollow of my hand, having no other vessel at my disposal.

Rosette expressed a desire to appease her thirst with some of this water, and begged me to bring her a few drops, — not daring, she said, to bend as low as was necessary in order to reach it. I plunged my two hands, clasped as closely as possible, into the clear fountain. Then I raised them like a cup to Rosette's lips and held them thus until she drained the water they contained; this did not take long, for there was very little, and the little there was dripped between my fingers,

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close though I held them. We thus made a very pretty group, and it is much to be regretted that a sculptor was not there to make a sketch of it.

When she had almost finished, my hand being near her lips, she could not help kissing it, in such a way, however, that I might readily have believed that it was merely an aspiration intended to exhaust the last watery pearl lying in the palm of my hand; but I was not to be deceived, and the lovely blush which suddenly covered her face sufficiently denounced her.

She took my arm again, and we walked towards the hut. My beauty kept as close to me as she could, and bent as she spoke so that her bosom pressed upon my sleeve, — an extremely clever attitude, capable of troubling any one but me. I could plainly feel the firm, clean outline and the gentle warmth of her breast. Moreover, I could notice its precipitate beating, which, were it affected or true, was none the less flattering and engaging.

We thus reached the door of the hut, which I opened with a kick. I certainly did not expect the sight which I beheld. I had looked to find a cabin hung with reeds, with a mat on the ground and a few stools to rest upon. Far from it. It was a boudoir furnished

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with the greatest elegance imaginable. The panels above the doors and mirrors represented the most sensuous scenes of the "Metamorphoses" of Ovid,—Salmacis and Hermaphrodite, Venus and Adonis, Apollo and Daphne, and other mythological love affairs, painted in a pale-lilac monochrome. The bays were covered with Burgundy roses and little daisies, the hearts of which alone, through a refinement of luxury, were gilded, while the leaves were silvered. A silver braid bordered all the furniture, and was also used to loop up hangings of the loveliest blue that can be imagined, marvellously adapted to show to the best advantage the whiteness and brilliancy of the skin. Innumerable charming trifles were placed on the mantelpiece, the tables, and the shelves. There were any number of cosy chairs, low seats, and sofas, which sufficiently proved that this retreat was not destined to very austere occupations, and that assuredly it was not intended for maceration. A handsome *rocaille* clock, placed upon a richly inlaid pedestal, stood beside a tall Venetian mirror, in which it was repeated with strange brilliancy and reflections. It had stopped, as if it were a superfluous matter to mark the hours in a place intended to make you forget them.

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I told Rosette that this refinement of luxury pleased me, and that I considered it in very good taste to hide the greatest splendour under an appearance of the greatest simplicity, just as I strongly approved of a woman having embroidered petticoats and a chemise edged with costly lace under an ordinary linen dress; it was a delicate attention for the lover she had or might have, which he could not be sufficiently grateful for,—and that it was undoubtedly better to put a diamond inside a nut than a nut inside a gold box. Rosette, to prove to me that she was of my opinion, drew up her dress and showed me the edge of her petticoat richly embroidered with great flowers and foliage. It depended upon me alone to be admitted to the secret of the greater hidden magnificence, but I did not ask to see whether the beauty of the chemise corresponded to that of the petticoat. Probably it was just as luxurious. Rosette let fall her dress, sorry not to have shown more. Yet this exhibition had quite served her purpose of displaying an ankle admirably turned and giving the highest opinion of the rest of the limb. That limb, which she extended in order to spread out her skirt better, was really marvellously fine and beautiful in its pearl-gray silk stocking, close fitting and drawn tight; and the little high-heeled

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slipper adorned with a bow of ribbon, with which it was shod, resembled the glass slipper worn by Cinderella. I paid her the most sincere compliments on this, and told her that I scarcely knew of any handsomer legs or smaller feet, and I did not believe it was possible for a woman to have them more shapely. Whereunto she replied, with a most charming and sweet frankness, "You are quite right."

Then she went to a panel in the wall, drew out one or two flagons of liquor and some plates of sweets and cakes; placed these on a small round table, and came to sit down by me in a rather narrrow arm-chair, so that I was obliged, in order not to be too much crowded, to put my arm around her waist. As she had both hands free, and as I could actually use the left hand only, she herself filled my glass and put fruits and sweets upon my plate. Soon, indeed, seeing that I did not manage very skilfully, she said to me, "Come, leave it alone! I shall feed you, child that you are, since you cannot manage it for yourself." So she put the pieces to my lips and forced me to swallow them quicker than I would, pushing them in with her pretty fingers exactly as is done with birds that are fed; whereat she laughed greatly. I could not, of course, avoid returning to her

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fingers the kiss that she had but a short time before bestowed on the palms of my hands; and as if to prevent me, but in reality in order to afford me an opportunity of kissing more ardently, she tapped my mouth two or three times with the back of her hand. She had drunk two or three glasses of Barbadoes cream, and a glass of Canary wine, — not a very great deal certainly, but sufficient to excite a woman accustomed to drink water scarcely reddened by wine. Rosette let herself fall back and leaned most amorously upon my arm. She had thrown off her cape, and I could see the upper part of her bosom, which showed more strikingly owing to her attitude. It was most ravishingly delicate and transparent in tone, while the form was of marvellous purity and solidity. I looked at it for some time with indefinable emotion and pleasure, and it occurred to me that men were favoured more than we are in love matters, for we give them the most charming treasures to possess, while they have nothing similar to offer us. What a delight it must be to explore with one's lips a fine smooth skin, and rounded contours which seem to offer themselves to kisses and to provoke them! The satin-like flesh and the curves which run one into another, the silky locks so soft to

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the touch, — what inexhaustible subjects of delicate voluptuousness, which we do not have with men. Our caresses can scarce be but passive; and yet there is more pleasure in giving than in receiving.

These remarks I should certainly not have made last year, and I should have looked upon all the bosoms and all the shoulders in the world without troubling to know whether they were shapely or otherwise; but since I have thrown off the apparel of my own sex and lived with men, a hitherto unknown feeling has developed in me, a feeling for beauty. Women usually lack it — I do not know why, for at first sight it would seem as if they were better able to judge of beauty than men; but as it is they who possess it, and as the knowledge of one's self is the most difficult of all, it is not surprising that they do not understand it at all. Usually, if a woman thinks another woman pretty, you may be sure that the latter is very ugly, and that not a single man would be attracted by her. On the other hand, all the women whose beauty and grace are praised by men are unanimously considered abominable and affected by the whole petticoated flock, which utters endless cries and clamours against them. If I were what I seem to be I would ask for no better

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guide in my choice, and the disapproval of women would be to me a sufficient certificate of beauty.

Now I love and understand beauty. The clothes I wear have separated me from my sex and taken away the feeling of rivalry, and I am able to judge better than any one else. I am no longer a woman, but I am not yet a man, and desire will not blind me to the extent of mistaking lay figures for idols. I look on coolly and without prejudice either for or against, and my position is as thoroughly disinterested as it is possible to be. The length and delicacy of the eyelashes, the transparency of the temples, the limpidity of the eye, the shell-like form of the ear, the tone and quality of the hair, the aristocratic shape of the feet and hands, the more or less fine ankles, knees, and wrists, — a thousand things which I had not previously noticed and which constitute true beauty and prove high breeding now guide me in my appreciation and scarcely allow me to make a mistake. I believe that one might blindly accept a woman of whom I should have said, "Indeed, she is not so bad."

By a very natural consequence I understand pictures much better than I did before, and although I have but a very superficial acquaintance with the masters, it

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would be difficult to make me accept a poor painting as a good one. I find a deep and singular charm in this study; for like everything else in the world, physical beauty requires to be studied, and does not allow itself to be grasped at once.

But let us go back to Rosette. From that subject to her the transition is not difficult. The two ideas are connected. As I said, my beauty had fallen back on my arm, and her head was leaning on my shoulder. Emotion flushed her lovely cheeks with a tender rose tint which the dark spot of a patch most coquettishly placed brought out admirably. Her teeth shone through her smile like raindrops within a poppy, and her eyelashes, half closed, still further increased the moist brilliancy of her great eyes. A sunbeam shone with innumerable metallic reflections upon her soft and silky hair, a few curls of which had escaped and fell in long love-locks down her round, plump neck, the warm whiteness of which they brought out. A few detached hairs, more rebellious than the others, were apart from the mass and curled in capricious spirals; gilded with strange reflections and flushed by the light they showed all the colours of the prism, and looked like those golden haloes which surround the heads of virgins in

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old pictures. We were both silent, and I amused myself by tracing under the pearly transparency of her temples the little azure veins, and the soft, delicate diminution of the down at the extremity of her eyebrows. My beauty seemed to be sunk in thought and lost in dreams of infinite pleasure. Her arms hung down with the curves and softness of a scarf that has been untied; her head fell back more and more, as if the muscles that sustained it had been cut or were too weak to sustain it. She had drawn her two little feet under her petticoats, and she had succeeded in snuggling up completely within the angle of the arm-chair I occupied, so that although the chair was narrow, there still remained a great empty space on the other side.

Her body, yielding and supple, clung close to mine like wax, and followed the lines of mine as closely as possible. Water even could not have insinuated itself more exactly into all the sinuosities of the line. Thus close pressed to my side, she looked like that second line which painters add to their drawings on the shadow side so as to render it richer and stronger. Only a woman in love can thus undulate and embrace; ivy and willows do not approach her.

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I felt the soft warmth of her body through her dress and mine; a thousand magnetic currents radiated from her. Her whole being seemed to have passed into me and to have abandoned her completely. Every moment she languished and fainted and yielded more and more. Slight pearly drops showed upon her lustrous brow, her eyes became moist, and two or three times she made as though she would raise her hands to conceal them, but when half-way they fell weary into her lap and she could not manage it. A great tear shone upon her eyelid and rolled over her burning cheek, upon which it was soon dried up.

My situation was becoming very embarrassing and exceedingly ridiculous. I felt that I must seem enormously stupid to her, and that was particularly disagreeable to me, although it was not in my power to seem anything else. Bold, uncompromising ways were forbidden to me, and yet they were the only ones suitable to the situation. I was too sure not to meet with resistance to venture upon them, and indeed, I did not know which way to turn. To chatter love sayings and pay her compliments would have been all very fine at first, but nothing could have been more inappropriate at the point we had now reached. To get

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up and go would have been most impolite; and, besides, I will not wager that Rosette would not have played the part of Potiphar's wife and held me back by the corner of my cloak. I should have had no virtuous motive to explain my resistance. Besides, — I own it to my shame, — this scene, equivocal though its character was, did not lack a certain charm which had more power over me than was right. Her ardent desire heated me with its flame, and I was sorry to be unable to satisfy it. I even wished I were a man, as I appeared to be, so as to crown her love, and I greatly regretted that Rosette should be mistaken. My breath came fast, I felt myself blushing, and I was scarcely less troubled than my poor love. The thought of the similarity of sex was gradually fading away, leaving only a vague notion of pleasure. My glance became moist, my lips trembled, and had Rosette been a man instead of being what she was, she could certainly have had me without difficulty.

At last, unable to stand it longer, she rose abruptly with a sort of spasmodic movement, and began to walk up and down the room rapidly. Then she stopped before the mirror to rearrange some locks of hair which had gone astray.

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While she was thus walking about I looked very much like a fool, and scarcely knew which way to turn.

She stopped before me and seemed to reflect.

She thought outrageous shyness kept me back, and that I was more of a schoolboy than she had first thought. Carried beyond herself and worked up to the highest degree of passionate desire, she determined to make a supreme effort and to stake her all, at the risk of losing the game.

She came to me, and quicker than lightning sat down upon my knees, threw her arms around my neck, clasped her hands behind my head, while her lips were glued to mine with mad violence. I felt her breasts, half bare and excited, heaving against my bosom, while her clasped fingers clutched my hair. A thrill went through me and my bosoms swelled. Rosette did not let go of my mouth. Her lips sucked in my lips, her teeth touched my teeth, our breaths mingled. I drew back for a moment, and two or three times turned away my head to avoid her kisses, but an invincible attraction made me turn again, and I kissed her in return almost as ardently as she had kissed me. I do not quite know what would have happened, if a loud bark-

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ing had not just then been heard outside the door, with a sound of claws scratching. The door gave way and a handsome white greyhound sprang into the hut, yelping and jumping about.

Rosette rose suddenly, and with one spring was at the other side of the room. The handsome white greyhound leaped around her joyously and delightedly, and tried to reach her hands to lick them. She was so much agitated that she had great difficulty in readjusting her mantle on her shoulders. The greyhound was the favourite dog of her brother Alcibiades. It never left him, and when you saw the hound, you might be sure the master was not far off. This is what had so troubled poor Rosette. Indeed, Alcibiades himself came in a minute later, booted and spurred, whip in hand.

"Ah, there you are!" said he. "I have been looking for you for an hour past, and I certainly should not have found you had not my good greyhound Snug unearthed you in your hiding-place." And he cast at his sister a glance half serious, half playful, which made her blush up to the eyes.

"You had apparently some very difficult subjects to discuss, since you withdrew into so deep a solitude.

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No doubt you were talking of theology and the double nature of the soul."

"Oh, dear, no! Our occupation was by no means so sublime. We were eating cake and talking fashions — that is all."

"I do not believe it. You appear to me to have been deeply sunk in some sentimental dissertation. But by way of changing your vaporous conversation, I think it would not be bad for you to come and have a ride. I have a new mare that I want to try. You shall ride her too, Theodore, and we shall see what we can make of her."

The three of us went out together, I taking his arm and Rosette taking mine. The expression of our respective faces was singularly different. Alcibiades was thoughtful, I was quite at my ease, and Rosette was exceedingly put out.

Alcibiades had arrived very opportunely for me, but very inopportunely for Rosette, who thus lost all the fruit of her clever advances and her ingenious tactics. The whole business would have to be gone over again. Had it lasted another quarter of an hour, the devil take me if I know what would have been the outcome of our adventure. I do not see what it could have been.

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Perhaps it would have been better that Alcibiades should not have interrupted us exactly at the critical moment, like a god out of his machine. There would have had to be a finish of some sort. During that scene I was two or three times on the point of confessing to Rosette who I really was; but the fear of passing for an adventuress and of seeing my secret divulged, kept back the words as they were ready to leave my lips.

Such a state of things could not possibly last. The only way of cutting short this hopeless intrigue was to leave. And so at dinner I officially announced that I would set out the very next day. Rosette, who was seated beside me, nearly fainted on hearing this piece of news; her beautiful face turned suddenly pale; she cast on me a glance of pain and reproach which moved and troubled me almost as much as she was moved and troubled. The aunt held up her old, wrinkled hands with a gesture of painful surprise, and in her thin and trembling voice, which was more unsteady even than usual, she said to me, "Oh, Mr. Theodore, are you leaving us so suddenly? That is not right. Yesterday you did not seem in the least prepared to go. The postman has not come, so you have received no letters,

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and you have no reason. You had promised to stay another fortnight, and now you take back your word! You really have not the right to do so. A gift should never be taken back. You can see for yourself how Rosette is looking at you, and how she is annoyed with you. I warn you that I shall be at least as much annoyed and that I shall show you just as troubled a face, — and a face of sixty-eight is much more terrible than one of twenty-three. See what you are exposing yourself to voluntarily! — the anger of the aunt and that of the niece; and all for some strange caprice which has suddenly occurred to you between the fruit and the cheese."

Alcibiades swore, bringing his fist heavily down upon the table, that he would barricade the gates of the mansion and hamstring my horse rather than let me go.

Rosette cast on me another glance, so sad and beseeching that I should have had to be as savage as a tiger that has been starving for a week to resist it.

I did not resist it, and although it greatly annoyed me, I solemnly promised to remain. Dear Rosette would willingly have thrown herself into my arms and kissed me on the mouth for my kindness. Alcibiades

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seized my hand in his big hand and shook it so violently that he nearly dislocated my shoulder, made my rings oval instead of round, as they were, and cut three of my fingers rather badly. The old lady, by way of showing her joy, sniffed up an immense pinch of snuff.

Rosette, nevertheless, did not wholly regain her cheerfulness. The idea that I might go away and that I wished to do so, an idea which had not yet clearly occurred to her, threw her into a deep reverie. The colour, which the announcement of my departure had driven from her cheeks, did not return as bright as before; her face remained pale and her heart uneasy. My conduct towards her surprised her more and more. After the marked advances which she had made to me, she could not understand the motives which caused me to be so reserved in my relations with her. What she wished was to bring on before my departure an absolute, decisive engagement, not doubting that thereafter it would be exceedingly easy for her to detain me as long as she wished.

She was right in this, and had I not been a woman, her calculations would have been quite correct; for whatever may have been said of the satiety of pleasure and of the disgust which usually follows passion, any

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man who has anything of a heart and who is not wretchedly and hopelessly *blasé* feels his love increased by his happiness, and very often the best way to retain a lover ready to leave is to give one's self up to him without reserve.

Rosette intended to bring me to a decisive point before my departure, knowing how difficult it is to renew a *liaison* at the very point at which it has been dropped; and besides, being in no wise sure of ever meeting me again under equally favourable circumstances, she neglected none of the occasions which might occur to put me into a position to declare myself openly and to abandon the evasive offishness behind which I intrenched myself. And, for my part, I had made up my mind to avoid any kind of encounter similar to that in the rustic pavilion; while I could not, however, without appearing ridiculous, affect too much coldness toward Rosette and introduce into our relations a little girl's prudishness, I did not quite know how to behave myself, and I always tried that there should be a third party with us. Rosette, on the contrary, did her utmost to be alone with me, and she succeeded pretty often, the mansion being far from town and not much frequented by the nobility of the

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neighbourhood. My secret resistance stunned and surprised her. At times she doubted and hesitated as to the power of her charms, and seeing herself so little loved, she was occasionally not far from believing that she was ugly. Then she increased her attentions and her coquetry, and although, being in mourning, she could not make use of all the resources of dress, she nevertheless knew how to adorn and vary her toilet so as to be every day two or three times more charming than before, — which is saying not a little. She tried everything. She was playful, melancholy, tender, passionate, eager, coquettish, affected even. She put on, one after another, all those adorable masks which become women so thoroughly that one at last knows not whether they are masks or their real faces. She assumed successively eight or ten different individualities, contrasting with each other, to see which would please me most, so that she might adopt it. In her own person she laid before me a complete seraglio, from which I had only to make a choice; but she succeeded in nothing, as will be easily understood. The ill success of all her stratagems caused her to fall into deep amazement. As a matter of fact, she would have turned the head

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of Nestor and melted the ice of chaste Hippolytus himself, and in outward appearance I am anything but Nestor or Hippolytus. I am young; I have a proud, firm mien, and a bold way of talking — except in a *tête-à-tête*.

She must have thought that all the witches of Thrace and Thessaly had cast their spells upon me, or that, at the very least, I was not much of a man, and she must have had a very poor opinion of my virility — which, as a matter of fact, does not amount to much. However, it would seem that this idea did not occur to her, and that she attributed my singular reserve merely to my want of love for her.

The days went by and her affairs did not prosper. She was visibly affected by this. An expression of sad uneasiness had replaced the ever fresh smile upon her lips. The corners of her mouth, so charmingly turned up, now markedly turned down, formed a firm, serious line. A few little veins stood out more plainly upon her eyelids; her cheeks, but recently so peach-like, had preserved but their imperceptible bloom. Often from my window I could see her crossing the flower garden in her morning wrapper. She walked scarcely lifting her feet, as if she were gliding along,

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her two arms languidly crossed upon her bosom, her head bent, more bowed than a willow branch that dips in the wave, with something about her broken down and undulating, like a drapery that is too long and the end of which trails on the earth. At such times she looked like one of those women of antiquity who were a prey to the wrath of Venus, and whom the pitiless goddess pursued. It is thus that I imagine Psyche looked when she had lost Cupid.

On the days when she did not make an effort to overcome my coldness and my hesitation, her love had a simple and primitive way about it that was charming. It was a silent, trustful yielding of herself, a chaste facility of caresses, an inexhaustible openness and fulness of heart; all the treasures of a fine nature unreservedly brought forth. She had none of those mean little ways that are to be met with in almost all women, even the most richly endowed. She sought no disguise, but calmly let me see the whole extent of her passion. Her self-love did not for an instant revolt at my not responding to her many advances, for pride leaves the heart on the day that love enters it; and if ever any one was truly loved, I was by Rosette. She suffered, but

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without complaining, without bitterness, and attributed to herself alone the ill success of her attempts. Meanwhile her pallor augmented daily. On the battlefield of her cheeks the lilies had fought with the roses a great fight, in which the roses had been finally routed. I grieved at this, but naturally I was the least able to help it. The more gently and the more affectionately I spoke to her, the more caressing were my ways, the more deeply did I drive into her heart the barbed arrow of impossible love. If I sought to console her to-day, I prepared a much greater desire for the future. My remedies poisoned the wound while appearing to soothe it. I repented of all the pleasant things I had ever said to her, and I wished, because of the great friendship I felt for her, I could find means to be hated by her. Disinterestedness could not have been carried farther, for assuredly I should have been very sorry to have been so hated, though it would have been better.

Twice or thrice I tried to speak harshly to her. I quickly came back to soft things, however, for I dread her smile less than I do her tears. On those occasions, although the loyalty of my intention fully absolves me in my conscience, I am more touched

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than I should be, and I feel something which is not far from remorse. A tear can scarcely be dried save by a kiss, and you cannot decently leave it to be done by a handkerchief, were it of the finest cambric in the world. I undo what I have done; the tear is quickly forgotten, quicker than is the kiss; and the consequence to me is always an increase of embarrassment.

Rosette, who sees that I am going to escape from her, clings persistently and wretchedly to the remains of her hope, and my position becomes more and more complicated. Several times, although less violently, I have felt the strange sensation that came over me in the little hermitage, — an inexplicable emotion, caused by the ardent caresses of my loving beauty. Often when seated near Rosette, her hand in mine, listening to her as she softly coos in her speech, I imagine that I am the man she believes me to be, and that if I do not respond to her love, it is due to pure cruelty on my part.

One evening, I know not by what chance, I happened to be alone in the green room with the old lady. She was working at some embroidery; for in spite of her sixty-eight years, she is never idle, desiring, she

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says, to finish, before she dies, a piece of work which she has begun and which she has been at for a very long time. Feeling somewhat tired, she laid down her embroidery and leaned back in her arm-chair. She looked at me very attentively, and her grey eyes sparkled through her glasses with strange vivacity. She passed her thin hand two or three times over her wrinkled brow, and seemed to be thinking deeply. The remembrance of the days that were no more and that she regretted, gave her face a melancholy expression of tenderness. I was silent, fearing to trouble her thoughts, and the silence lasted for a few minutes. She broke it at last.

"You have the very eyes of my dear Henry, — the same moist, bright look, the same carriage of the head, the same gentle and proud mien. One could swear you are he. You cannot imagine how close is the resemblance, Mr. Theodore. When I see you I cannot believe that Henry is dead. I only think that he has been on a long voyage, and that now he has at last returned. You have given me much pleasure, and much pain, Theodore, — pleasure by recalling my poor Henry to me, and pain by showing me how great is the loss I have suffered. Sometimes I have mis-

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taken you for his ghost. I cannot get reconciled to the idea that you are going to leave us. It seems to me that I am losing my Henry once again."

I told her that if it were possible for me to remain longer, I should do so with pleasure, but that my stay had already been prolonged far beyond proper bounds. Then besides, I proposed to return, for I had much too pleasant remembrances of the mansion to forget it so quickly.

"Sorry as I am that you are leaving us, Mr. Theodore," she went on, following her own train of thought, "there is some one here who will be still more sorry than I. You know very well whom I mean without my naming names. I do not know what we shall do with Rosette when you shall have gone. This old home is very sad. Alcibiades is always out hunting, and for a young woman like herself the society of a poor invalid like me is not very cheerful."

"If any one is to feel any regret, madam, it is neither you nor Rosette, but I. You lose little, I much. You will easily find more agreeable company than mine, and I doubt whether I can ever make up for yours and Rosette's."

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"I will not quarrel with your modesty, my dear sir, but I know how things are. It is likely that we shall not see Mistress Rosette bright again for a long time, for it is you who make her smile or weep as you please. Her mourning is drawing to an end, and it would be most regrettable that she should put away her gaiety with her last black dress. It would set a very bad example and be quite contrary to ordinary laws. Now that is a thing which you can prevent without taking too much trouble, and which no doubt you will prevent," said the old lady, dwelling markedly upon the last words.

"Certainly I shall do my best to have your dear niece preserve her gay temper, since you imagine that I have so much influence over her; and yet I scarcely see how I am to set about it."

"Oh, indeed! You scarcely see how you can set about it? What is the good of those fine eyes of yours? I did not know that you were so short-sighted. Rosette is free. She has eighty thousand a year entirely in her own right, and women twice as plain as she are thought very pretty. You are young, handsome, and I fancy, unmarried. The matter seems to me the simplest in the world, unless you feel an in-

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surmountable dislike to Rosette — which it is difficult to believe."

"Which is not, and cannot be; for her heart is as beautiful as her form. She is one of those women who might be ugly without its being perceived, and without any one desiring that she should be otherwise. She might be ugly with impunity, and she is charming."

"You are doubly right. I do not doubt what you say, but she has taken the wiser part. As far as she is concerned, I would willingly answer for it that there are a thousand persons whom she hates more than you, and that if she were asked several times she would perhaps end by confessing that you are not wholly indifferent to her. You wear on your finger a ring which would fit her perfectly, for your hand is almost as small as hers, and I am almost sure that she would accept it with pleasure."

The good lady stopped for a moment to see the effect her words would have upon me, and I know not if she was satisfied with the expression of my face. I was cruelly embarrassed, and I knew not what to answer. From the very beginning of the conversation I had seen whither tended all her insinuations,

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and although I myself expected what she had just said, it left me very much surprised and speechless. I could only refuse, but what satisfactory motives could I give for such a refusal? I had none, save that I am a woman. Undoubtedly it is an excellent reason, but it happened to be the only one which I did not wish to give. I could not shelter myself behind fierce and ridiculous parents; every parent in the world would have welcomed such a match with delight. Even had Rosette not been what she is — good and beautiful and well born — her eighty thousand a year would have removed all obstacles. To say that I did not love her would have been neither true nor honest, for I really loved her deeply and more than any woman loves another woman. I was too young to pretend to be engaged to some one else. So the best thing I could think of was to let it be understood that, being the youngest of the family, the interests of our house required me to enter the Order of Malta and did not permit me to think of marriage; a fact which caused me the deepest possible grief since I had seen Rosette. My reply was not worth a damn, and I was thoroughly aware of it. The old lady was not deceived by it and did not consider it final. She concluded that I had

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spoken thus simply to have time to reflect and consult my parents; in point of fact, the match was so advantageous and unhoped for, so far as I was concerned, that it was impossible I should refuse it, even if I had not loved Rosette, or loved her but little. It was a piece of luck not to be neglected.

I do not know whether the aunt made these overtures to me at the suggestion of her niece, though I incline to believe that Rosette had nothing to do with them. She loved me too artlessly and too ardently to think of anything else than possessing me at once, and marriage would assuredly have been the last of the means she would have employed.

The old dowager, who had not failed to notice our intimacy — which no doubt she believed much greater than it really was — had devised that plan in her own mind to keep me beside her and to replace, as far as possible, her own dear son Henry, killed in battle, to whom she thought I was so strangely like. She had turned to account our being alone together to have an explanation with me. I saw by her face that she did not consider herself defeated, but that she proposed to renew the subject — to my great contrariety.

Rosette, on her part, made that very night a last

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attempt, which had such serious results that I must give you a separate description of it, and which I cannot tell you of in this letter, already unconscionably long. You shall see to what strange adventures I was predestined, and how Heaven had cut me out beforehand for the heroine of a novel. I confess, I do not quite see the morality which may be drawn from the whole business. But human lives are not like fables; every page does not have at the end of it a rimed maxim. Very often the feeling of life is that it is not death — that is all.

Farewell, my dear. I kiss your lovely eyes. You shall receive very speedily a continuation of my triumphant biography.

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XIII

THEODORE, — Rosalind, — for I know not by what name to call you, — I saw you but a moment since, and now I am writing to you. Would I knew your woman's name! It must be sweet as honey and flit on the lips more suave and more harmonious than verse. I should never have dared to tell you that, and yet I should have died had I not said it. What I have suffered, no one knows or can know. Even I can give but a faint idea of it. Words cannot express this anguish. It would be thought I had twisted my sentences for the pleasure of twisting them, that I had wearied myself to say new and singular things and to fall into the most extravagant exaggeration, when in reality I should have depicted what I felt with images scarcely adequate. O Rosalind! I love you, I adore you. Why are there no stronger expressions? I have never loved or worshipped any one but you. I am prostrate before you. I am as naught in your presence, and I wish I could compel all creation to bend the knee before my idol. To me you are more than all nature, more than heaven,

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more than God. It often seems strange to me that God does not come down from heaven to be your slave. Where you are not is a desert, is death, is darkness. You alone people the world for me. You are life and the sun. You are everything to me. When you smile, it is day; when you are sad it is night. The spheres follow the movement of your frame, and the celestial harmonies are directed by you, O my dearest queen, O my fair dream come true! You are clothed in splendour, and you float ever in a radiant vapour.

I have known you scarce three months, but I have loved you for a long time. Before I saw you I languished with love for you. I called you and sought you, and despaired because I did not meet you on my way, knowing that never could I love any other woman. How often have you appeared to me! At the window of a mysterious mansion, leaning dreamily on the balcony and casting to the winds the petals of a flower, or else a spirited horsewoman on your Turkish steed whiter than snow, traversing at a gallop the dark lanes of the forest. You had those same proud, gentle eyes, the same diaphanous hands, the same beautiful waving hair, and that faint smile so terribly disdainful. Only you were less fair; for the most

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ardent, the maddest imagination, that of a painter or poet, cannot reach that sublime poetry of reality. There is in you an inexhaustible well of graces, an ever springing fountain of mysterious seduction. You are a jewel-case ever open, filled with the most precious pearls, and in your most unconscious gestures, in your most careless phrases, you cast constantly with royal profusion inestimable treasures of beauty. If the swift undulations of a contour, if the soft outlines of an attitude could be fixed and preserved in a mirror, the mirrors before which you have passed would make men despise the divinest paintings of Raphael and look upon them as no better than tavern signs. Every gesture, every pose of your head, every different aspect of your body, is engraved on my soul with a diamond point, and nothing on earth can efface the deep imprint. I know the spot where fell the shadow, and that where shone the light; the surface on which gleamed the sunbeams and the place where the passing reflection melted into the softest tints of the neck and the cheek. I could draw your picture in your absence. The thought of you is always present with me.

When yet a child I would spend whole hours standing before the old pictures of the masters, eagerly

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searching their dark depths. I gazed upon those marvellous figures of saints and goddesses, whose ivory or wax-white flesh stood out so marvellously against the dark background, blackened by the decomposition of the pigments. I admired the simplicity and magnificence of their mien, the strange gracefulness of their hands and feet, the proud and well marked character of their features, at once so delicate and firm, the grand effect of the draperies fluttering around their divine shapes, the purple folds of which seemed to stretch like lips to embrace these beautiful bodies. By dint of obstinately making my gaze penetrate the veil of smoke thickened by the centuries, my sight grew confused, the contours lost their precision, and a sort of motionless, dead life filled all these phantasms of vanished beauties; and I came to believe that these faces vaguely resembled the fair unknown whom I worshipped within my heart. I sighed as I thought that she whom I wished to love was one of these perhaps, and it affected me to the point of making me shed tears and making me greatly wroth with myself at not having been born in the sixteenth century when all these beauties had lived. I thought it unpardonably stupid and senseless on my part. As I grew older the

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beloved phantom haunted me more closely. I saw it ever between me and the women I had for mistresses, smiling with ironical look and jeering at their human loveliness with all the perfection of its divine beauty. It caused me to think women ugly who were really charming and made to make happy whoever was not in love with that adorable shade whose beauty I believed not to exist and which was but a presentiment of yours. Oh, Rosalind, how unhappy I have been because of you before I knew you! Oh, Theodore, how unhappy I was on your account after I knew you! Were you but willing, you could open to me the paradise of my dreams. You stand on the threshold like a guardian angel, wrapped in its wings, and you have the golden key in your hands. Answer, Rosalind, answer! will you open it?

I wait but a word from you to live or to die. Will you speak it?

Are you Apollo driven from heaven, — or fair Aphrodite risen from the bosom of the sea? Where have you left your jewelled car drawn by four fairy horses? What have you done with your pearly shell and your dolphins with the azure tails? What amorous nymph has caused her beauty to melt in yours, O

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fair young man, more charming than Cyparissus and Adonis, more adorable than all women?

But you are a woman. We are no longer in the time of the Metamorphoses. Adonis and Hermaphrodite are dead, and no man could attain to such a degree of beauty. For since the heroes and the gods have passed away, you women alone preserve in your marble bodies, as in a Greek temple, the precious gift of form anathematised by Christ, to show that heaven has nothing which earth need envy. You worthily represent the first divinity of the world, the purest symbolisation of the eternal essence — beauty.

As soon as I saw you, something was torn apart in me; a veil fell, a door was opened. I felt myself inwardly flooded with waves of light. I understood that my life was before me, and that I had at last reached the decisive turning. The obscure and dim parts of the half-radiant face which I tried to make out in the shadow were suddenly lighted up; the deeper tints which overspread the background were softly illumined; a tender rosy light fell upon the greenish ultramarine of the distance. The trees, which showed but as shapeless silhouettes, began to stand out more clearly; the dew-laden flowers shone like brilliant

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spots in the dull verdure of the turf. I saw the bull-finch with his scarlet breast on the top of an elder branch, the little white rabbit with pink eyes and erect ears — which puts its head out between two blades of wild thyme — rubbing its nose with its paws, and the timid stag which comes to drink at the spring and reflect its antlers in the water. Since the morning when the sun of love rose upon my life, all is changed. Where trembled in the shade vague forms whose very uncertainty made them terrible or mysterious, stand out graceful groups of trees in bloom, hills circling like charming amphitheatres, silver palaces whose terraces are laden with vases and statues, and which plunge their feet into azure lakes and seem to float between two skies. What I took in the obscurity for a gigantic dragon whose wings were armed with claws and which crawled across the night upon its scaly paws, turns out to be a felucca with silken sails, with painted and gilded sweeps, full of women and musicians; and the frightful crab which I believed I saw wave above my head its claws and pincers, is but a fan-palm whose long and narrow leaves rustle in the night breeze. My chimeras and my horrors have vanished. I love.

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Despairing of ever finding you, I charged my dreams with falsehood, I quarrelled madly with fate. I said to myself I was mad to seek for such beauty; and again that nature was very unfruitful and the Creator very unskilful, since neither could make real the simple thought in my heart. Prometheus had been filled with the noble pride of seeking to make a man and to rival God. I — I had created a woman, and I thought that, as a punishment for my boldness, an ever unsatisfied desire would gnaw my liver like another vulture. I expected to be chained with diamond fetters to a bare rock upon the shores of the wild ocean; but the lovely sea-nymphs with their long green hair, showing above the waves their white and pointed breasts, and displaying in the sunshine their bodies glistering like mother-of-pearl and dripping with the tears of the sea, would never come to lean upon the shore and talk to me and console me in my pain, as they do in the play by old Æschylus.

But it has not thus befallen me.

You came, — and then I had to reproach my imagination with its powerlessness. My torment was not that which I had feared, of being forever a prey to a vulture upon a sterile rock. I saw that indeed you

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existed, that my presentiments had not been false on this point; but you came to me with the ambiguous and terrible beauty of the sphinx; like Isis, the terrible goddess, you were enveloped in a veil which I dared not lift lest I should be struck dead. If you could only know with what breathless, resistless attention, in spite of my careless appearance, I watched and followed even your least motions. Nothing escaped me. How ardently I gazed at the little which showed of your flesh, at the neck or the wrists, to try to make out your sex. Your hands became for me a subject of profound study, and I may say that I know their slightest sinuosities, their most imperceptible veins, their least dimples. Were you to conceal yourself from head to foot in the most impenetrable domino, I should recognise you if I saw only one of your fingers. I analysed the undulations of your walk, the way in which you stepped, the way you threw back your hair. I tried to surprise your secret in the habit of your body. I watched you especially in those hours of ease when the bones seem to have withdrawn from the frame and when the limbs sink and bend as if they were undone, to see if the feminine outlines would show more plainly in that forgetfulness and noncha-

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lance. Never was any one gazed upon as ardently as you have been. I would lose myself for whole hours in that contemplation. Withdrawn to some corner of the drawing-room, in my hand a book that I read not, or concealed behind the curtain of my room when you were in your own and the blinds of your window were up, — then, penetrated to the full by the marvellous beauty that spreads around you and makes, as it were, an atmosphere of light around you, I would say to myself, "Unquestionably she is a woman!" But suddenly an abrupt gesture, a virile accent, or some cavalier manner would destroy in a minute my frail edifice of probabilities and cast me back into my primal uncertainty.

I would be sailing free over the boundless ocean of amorous reverie, and then you would come to fetch me to fence or to play tennis. The young girl, transformed into a young gentleman, hit me hard, sent the foil flying from my hands as smartly and quickly as the most experienced swashbuckler. Every moment in the day I had to suffer some such disappointment.

As I would approach you to say, "My dear beauty, it is you whom I adore," I would see you bend tenderly and whisper into a lady's ear madrigal on

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madrigal, compliment on compliment. Imagine what I felt! Or else some woman, whom in my strange jealousy I would have skinned alive with the greatest delight, would hang herself on your arm, draw you aside, confide to you I know not what puerile secrets, and keep you for hours in the embrasure of a window.

I raged when I saw women speak to you, for that made me believe you were a man; and had you been one, it would have been extreme pain to me even to tolerate their speaking to you. When a man approached you freely and familiarly, I was even more jealous; I thought then that you were a woman, and that perhaps they suspected it, as I did. I was a prey to the most contrary passions, and I knew not which way to turn.

I grew wroth with myself; I addressed to myself the harshest reproaches at being so tormented by such a love, and not having the strength to uproot from my heart the venomous plant which had grown up in it in one night like a poisonous mushroom. I cursed you, I called you my evil genius. For a moment I thought you were Beelzebub in person, for I could not understand the sensations I felt when near you.

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Once I was thoroughly convinced that you were in fact none else than a woman in disguise, the unlikelihood of the motive which I sought to find for such a caprice oppressed me, and again I would begin to deplore that the form which I dreamed of for the love of my soul happened to belong to one of the same sex as myself. I blamed fate, which had given to a man such a charming outward form, and for my everlasting misfortune had made me meet him at the moment when I no longer hoped to see or realise the absolute ideal of pure beauty which I had so long caressed within my heart.

Now, Rosalind, I have the deep conviction that you are the most beautiful of women. I have seen you in the apparel of your sex, I have seen your shoulders, your arms, so fair, so perfectly rounded. The little of your bosom which your neckerchief allowed to be seen can be but a young girl's bosom. Neither Meleager the handsome nor Bacchus the effeminate, with their beautiful forms, ever had such suave lines, such wondrous fineness of skin, although both are in Parian marble and polished by the loving kisses of twenty centuries. My anxieties are ended as far as that goes, — but that is not all. You are a woman;

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my love is no longer reprehensible; I may yield to it without remorse, and be carried away by the current that takes me to you. However great, however mad the passion which I feel, it is allowable and I may own it. But you, Rosalind, for whom I burned in silence and who knew not the immensity of my love, you whom this late revelation may perhaps surprise, — do you not hate me? Do you love me? Can you love me? I know not, and I tremble, and am more wretched than before.

At times it seems to me that you do not hate me. When we played "As You Like It," you spoke certain lines in your part with an accent that deepened their meaning and urged me in some sort to declare myself. I thought I saw in your eyes and in your smile gracious promise of indulgence, and that I felt your hand return the pressure of mine. If I was mistaken — Oh, my God! I dare not think upon it. Encouraged by all this and urged by my love, I have written to you, for the dress you wear ill lends itself to such a confession; and many a time have the words stopped on my lips. Although I had the belief, the firm conviction, that I was speaking to a woman, your man's apparel frightened away all my

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tender, loving thoughts, and prevented their flying towards you.

I beseech you, Rosalind, if you love me not yet, try to love me. Try to love me, who love you in spite of the veil in which you have wrapped yourself, out of pity for us, no doubt. Do not devote the rest of my life to the most dread despair and the most sorrowful discouragement. Remember that I have adored you since the first ray of thought shone within my brain; that you were revealed to me beforehand, and that when I was still a child you appeared to me in my dreams, with a crown of dewdrops, with prismatic wings, and the little blue flower in your hand; that you are the aim, the means, the meaning of my life; that without you I am but an empty show, and that if you extinguish the flame you have lighted, there will remain within me but a pinch of dust finer and more impalpable than that which is scattered on the wings of death itself. Rosalind, you who have so many recipes to cure love-sickness, cure me, for I am most love-sick. Play your part to the end. Cast away the dress of the fair page, Ganymede, and hold out your white hand to the youngest son of the brave knight, Roland du Bois.

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XIV

I WAS at my window, occupied in watching the stars which were joyfully blooming in the heavens, and in breathing the perfume of the mirabilia wafted to me on a faint air. The draught from the open window had extinguished my lamp, the last which remained lighted in the mansion. My thoughts were turning into a vague reverie, and a sort of sleepiness began to creep over me. Nevertheless, I still remained leaning on the stone balustrade, either fascinated by the charm of night or careless and forgetful. Rosette, no longer perceiving the light in my room, and unable to see me because of a great shadow which fell exactly over the window, no doubt thought that I had gone to bed; and this was what she was waiting for to risk a last and desperate attempt. She opened the door so gently that I did not hear her come in, and she was within two steps of me before I perceived her. She was much astonished to perceive that I was still up. She came to me and took me by the arm, calling me twice by my name, — "Theodore, Theodore!"

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"What! you, Rosette, here at such an hour, without a light and in such a perfect deshabille?"

I must tell you that my beauty had on but a night-wrapper of exquisitely fine cambric, and the famous lace-edged chemise which I would not look at on the day of the unforgetable scene in the little kiosk in the park. Her arms, polished and cold as marble, were quite bare, and the cambric that covered her body was so soft and transparent that the nipples of her breasts showed as do those on the statues of bathers covered with wet drapery.

"Is it a reproach that you address to me, Theodore, or is it merely an exclamation? Yes, I, Rosette, the fair lady, here in your room, — not in my own where I ought to be, at eleven, at midnight perhaps, — without duenna or chaperon or maid; almost nude, in a mere night-wrapper. Very astonishing, is it not? I am as surprised as you can be, and I scarce know how to explain it."

As she said this, she put her arm around me and let herself fall on the foot of my bed so as to drag me down with her.

"Rosette," said I, endeavouring to disengage myself, "I shall try to light the lamp again. There is

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nothing so gloomy as darkness in a room; and then it is really wicked not to see when you are there, and to deprive myself of the sight of your beauty. Let me make, with a piece of tinder and a match, a little portable sun, which shall bring out all that jealous night effaces with its shadows."

"It is not worth while. I would rather that you should not behold my blushes. My cheeks are burning, — I feel as if I should die with shame."

She pressed her face to my breast and remained in that attitude for a few moments as if overcome by her emotions. For me, as she spoke, I mechanically passed my fingers through the long curls of her hair, which was undone. I sought in my brain for some decent way of getting out of my embarrassment, but found none, for I was literally in the last ditch, and Rosette appeared perfectly determined not to leave the room in the same condition in which she had entered it. Her dress had a terrible free-and-easiness about it which promised nothing good. I myself had on but a dressing-gown, which would have very ill defended my incognito, so that I was exceedingly uneasy as to the issue of the encounter.

"Theodore, listen to me," said Rosette, rising and

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throwing back her hair from the two sides of her face, as well as I could make out by the faint light which the stars and the very wan crescent of the moon, now rising, shed in the room, the window of which had remained open. "The step I have taken is strange, everybody would blame me for it; but you are soon going away, and I love you. I cannot let you go thus, without having an explanation with you. Perhaps you will never come back, — perhaps it is the first and last time I am to see you. Who knows whither you will go? But wherever you do go, you will take me and my love still with you. Had you remained I should never have done this. The happiness of seeing you and hearing you and living by you would have been sufficient. I would have asked nothing more. I would have concealed my love within my heart. You would have thought I was no more than a good and sincere friend. But this may not be. You say you must absolutely go. It wearies you, Theodore, to see me attached to your steps like a living shadow which cannot but follow you, and which seeks to form part of you. It displeases you, no doubt, always to find behind you beseeching eyes, and hands outstretched to seize the hem of your mantle. I know it, but I

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cannot help doing it. Besides, you have no reason to complain of it. I was calm, tranquil, almost happy before I knew you. You arrived, handsome, young, smiling, like unto Phœbus the charming god. You have been most delicately attentive to me, most careful. Never was a lover wittier and more gallant. Every moment roses and rubies fell from your lips; you turned everything into an opportunity for a madrigal, and you knew how to make the most insignificant phrases into adorable compliments. A woman who might have hated you mortally at first would have ended by loving you, and I — I loved you from the moment when I first saw you. Why, then, do you appear so surprised at being so much loved, — you who have been so lovable? Is it not a very natural consequence? I am neither foolish nor light-headed, nor a romantic little girl who falls in love with the first sword she sees. I am accustomed to society, I know what life is. What I am doing, any woman — even the most virtuous, even the most prudish — would have done too. What was your idea, what was your intention? To make me fond of you, I suppose, — for I cannot believe you had any other. How is it, then, that you seem to regret having succeeded so well?

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Have I unwittingly done anything to displease you? I beseech you to forgive me. Do you no longer think me fair? Have you discovered in me some defect which drives you away? You have the right to be exacting as to beauty, but either you have lied greatly, or I also am beautiful. I am young like yourself, I love you. Why do you now disdain me? You were so attentive to me, you supported my arm with such solicitude, you pressed my hand so tenderly when I gave it to you, you looked at me with such languorous glances! If you did not love me, why did you do all that? Were you cruel enough to awaken love in my heart so that afterwards you might laugh at it? It would be horrible mockery, impiety, sacrilege. Only an evil soul could thus amuse itself, and I cannot believe it of you, however inexplicable your conduct towards me. What, then, is the cause of this sudden change? I cannot see any. What mystery does your coolness conceal? I cannot believe that you feel repugnance for me. What you have done proves that you do not, for no one, not even the greatest hypocrite on earth, could court so hotly a woman for whom he felt distaste. Oh, Theodore, what have you against me? What has changed you

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thus? What have I done to you? If the love which you seemed to feel for me has vanished, my love for you still remains and I cannot uproot it from my heart. Have pity on me, Theodore, for I am most unhappy. Pretend, at least, to love me a little, and speak some sweet words to me. It will not cost you much unless you feel for me an invincible horror."

At this pathetic point in her plaint, her sobs completely stifled her voice, she crossed her two hands on my shoulder and laid her brow on them in an attitude of utter despair. All she said was absolutely true, and I had not a word to say in reply. I could not assume a bantering tone; it would have been highly improper. Rosette was not one who could be treated so lightly; and besides, I was too deeply moved to do it. I felt guilty at having thus trifled with the heart of a charming woman, and I was a prey to the liveliest and most sincere remorse.

Seeing that I did not answer her, the dear girl drew a deep sigh and made as if she would rise, but she fell back, broken by emotion. Then she clasped me in her arms, the cool touch penetrating through my doublet, put her face close to mine, and began to weep silently. Strange was the sensation as I felt streaming

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over my cheeks that inexhaustible current of tears which came not from my own eyes. Before long I mingled my own with hers, and it was a regular pouring rain, fit to cause a new deluge if only it had lasted forty days.

At this moment the moon happened to shine exactly in the window; a pale beam penetrated the room and lighted up with its bluish light the silent group that we formed. In her white wrapper, with her arms, her bosom, her breasts bare and almost as white as the cambric she wore, her loosened hair and her expression of grief, Rosette looked like an alabaster figure of melancholy seated on a tomb. As for myself, I do not quite know what I looked like, for I could not see myself and there was no mirror to reflect my image; but I fancy that I could very well have passed for a statue of incarnate uncertainty. I was agitated, and caressed Rosette more tenderly than usual. My hand had slipped from her hair to her velvety neck, and from that to her round and polished shoulder, which I smoothed gently, and the trembling line of which I felt. The girl quivered under my touch like an instrument at the touch of a musician; her flesh shuddered and worked perpetually, and amorous tremblings ran over her body.

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I myself felt a sort of confused desire, the aim of which I could not make out, but I experienced deep pleasure in feeling the contour of her bare and delicate form. I abandoned her shoulder, and profiting by an opening of a fold, I suddenly enclosed in my hand a frightened little breast, which palpitated madly like a dove surprised in its nest. From the extreme contour of her cheek, which I kissed with the lightest of kisses, I reached her half-opened lips. We remained thus for some time. I really cannot tell you if it was a minute, or fifteen, or sixty, for I wholly lost any idea of time and knew not if I were in heaven or on earth or dead. The intoxicating wine of voluptuousness had made me so drunken with the first sip I had swallowed that any reason I possessed had vanished. Rosette clasped me closer and closer in her arms, and enveloped me with her body. She bent convulsively over me and pressed me to her bare, heaving bosom. At each kiss her life seemed to run to the place I had touched, abandoning the rest of her person. Strange thoughts flashed through my brain. Had I not feared to betray my incognito, I should have given free rein to the passionate impulses of Rosette, and perhaps I should have made some vain, mad attempt to give a seeming

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of reality to that shadow of pleasure which my fair amorous one embraced so ardently. I had never yet had a lover, and her sharp attacks, her repeated caresses, the contact of her lithe body, the sweet names lost in kisses, agitated me extremely, although they came from a woman. And then, this nocturnal visit, this romantic passion, the moonlight, — all these together were to me full of a freshness and of a charm of novelty that made me forget I was not a man after all.

However, making a great effort, I told Rosette she was compromising herself horribly by coming to my room at such an hour and remaining so long in it; that her maids might notice her absence and perceive that she had not spent the night in her own chamber. I said it so weakly that Rosette, for sole reply, let fall her cambric wrapper, threw off her slippers, and slipped into my bed like an adder into a jar of milk; for she imagined that my clothes alone prevented my coming to a more precise demonstration, and that they were the sole obstacle which kept me back. She believed, poor child, that the hour so laboriously brought about was at last about to strike for her, — but it was only two o'clock in the morning that struck.

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My position could not have been more critical, when the door turned on its hinges and gave passage to Mr. Alcibiades in person. He held a candle in one hand, and a sword in the other. He went straight to the bed, threw back the blanket, and placing the light close to the face of Rosette, who seemed confounded, he said to her in a tone of raillery, " Good-morning, sister."

Poor little Rosette had not the strength to reply to him.

" So it seems, my very dear and very virtuous sister, that, having judged in your wisdom that Master Theodore's bed was pleasanter than yours, you have come to lie in it. Or perhaps there are ghosts in your room, and you thought that you would be safer in this one under the guard of the aforesaid gentleman. That is a very good idea. Ah, Mr. de Sérannes, so you have been ogling my sister, and you think that is going to be the end of it. I am of opinion that it would not be at all a bad thing for us to cut each other's throats a little bit, and if you are good enough to do your part, I shall be greatly obliged to you. Theodore, you have abused the friendship which I felt for you. You have made me repent

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of the opinion which I first formed of the loyalty of your character."

I could not defend myself properly; appearances were all against me. Who would have believed me if I had said, what was the truth, — that Rosette had come to my arms in spite of myself, and that, far from trying to make her love me, I was doing the utmost I could to drive her from me? There was but one thing for me to say, and I said it: "Sir Alcibiades, we will slash each other as much as you please."

During this conversation Rosette had not failed to faint, according to the most correct rules of pathos. I went to a crystal cup of water, — in which was plunged the stem of a great white rose, half the petals of which had fallen, — cast some drops in her face, and caused her quickly to recover her senses. Not quite knowing what to do with herself, she snuggled up in the farther corner of the bed, and hid her pretty head in the blanket like a bird that is cuddling down to sleep. She had so pulled up the sheets and pillows around her that it would have been very difficult to make out what there was under the heap. A few soft sighs which issued from time to time alone would have enabled one to guess that it was a young and repentant sinner; or, at

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least, one very sorry to be a sinner in intention only, and not in fact, — which was the case of the unfortunate Rosette.

Her brother, freed from anxiety regarding his sister, resumed his conversation and said to me more gently: "It is not absolutely indispensable that we should cut each other's throats at once, — that is an extreme measure which there is always time to resort to. Listen to me. A duel between us would not be quite fair. You are in early youth and much less vigorous than I; if we were to fight, I should certainly kill you or cripple you, and I would rather neither kill nor disfigure you, — it would be a great pity. Rosette under her blankets yonder, not saying a word, would hate me for it her life long, for she is tigerish and bitter in bearing a grudge, once she sets about it, that dear little dove. You do not know it, for you are Prince Galaor, and she bestows upon you charming delights only, but she is not all sweetness. Rosette is free, you also; it would seem that you are not irreconcilable foes. Her widowhood is drawing to an end, and things will thus turn out in the best possible way. Marry her; then she will not have to go back to her own bed; and for me, I shall thus be saved having to make you

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into a sheath for my sword, which would be agreeable neither to you nor to me. What think you of it?"

I must have pulled a very long face, for his plausible proposition was precisely the one which I could not accept. I could more readily have walked on all-fours on the ceiling like a fly, or brought down the sun without a footstool to help me, than do what he wanted, and yet his latter proposition was undoubtedly more agreeable than his first. He seemed surprised at my not accepting with delight, and repeated his words as if to give me time to reply.

"An alliance with you would indeed be most honourable for me, and I should never have dared to pretend to it. I am aware that it is marvellous fortune for a young man who has neither rank nor weight in the world, and that the most illustrious of men would esteem themselves lucky did they have the same chance. Nevertheless, I must persist in my refusal, and since I am free to choose between a duel and a wedding, I prefer the duel. It is an erratic taste, not a very common one, but it is my taste."

Here Rosette uttered the most dolorous of sobs, put her head out from below the pillow, and, when she saw my firm and impassible countenance, pulled

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it in again immediately, like a snail whose horns are struck.

"It is not because I do not love Mistress Rosette, — I love her deeply; but I have certain reasons why I will not marry, which you yourself would consider excellent, if it were possible for me to tell you them. Besides, matters have not gone as far as you might believe from appearances. Bar a few kisses, which our somewhat lively friendship suffices to explain and justify, nothing has occurred between us that might not be told, and the virtue of your sister is unquestionably the most intact and the cleanest in the world. I am bound to state this much. And now at what time shall we fight, Mr. Alcibiades, and where?"

"Here, on the spot!" cried Alcibiades, mad with anger.

"What are you thinking of? In Rosette's presence?"

"Defend yourself, you scoundrel, or I will murder you!" he continued, brandishing his sword and waving it around his head.

"At least, let us leave the room."

"If you don't fall on guard I will pin you to the wall, my handsome Celadon, and you may then flap your wings as much as you like, — you will not get

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Our swords flashed and rattled like a hammer on an anvil, for the small space we had at our disposal forced us to engage very closely

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clear, I warn you." And he dashed at me with his sword.

I drew my rapier, or he certainly would have carried out his threat, and at first I was satisfied to parry the lunges he made at me. Rosette made a superhuman effort to throw herself between our swords, for the two antagonists were equally dear to her, but her strength abandoned her and she fell fainting at the foot of the bed.

Our swords flashed and rattled like a hammer on an anvil, for the small space we had at our disposal forced us to engage very closely. Twice or thrice Alcibiades nearly hit me, and had I not had an excellent fencing-master my life would have been in the very greatest danger, for he was amazingly skilful and prodigiously strong. He made use of every ruse and feint known in fencing to get at me. Maddened at his ill success he uncovered himself twice or thrice. I did not care to profit by the opportunity, but he returned to the charge with such bitter and savage violence that I was forced to utilise the chances that he gave me. Besides, the noise and the whirling flash of steel intoxicated and dazzled me. I was not thinking of death and was not in the least afraid; the

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sharp, deadly point which gleamed every second before my eyes embarrassed me no more than if I had been fencing with buttoned foils; but I was indignant with Alcibiades for his brutality, and the consciousness of my perfect innocence still further increased my indignation. I merely wished to scratch his arm or shoulder to make him drop his sword, for I had vainly endeavoured to force it out of his hands, — he had a wrist of steel, and the devil himself could not have made him budge.

At last he lunged so sharply and fiercely that I was unable to more than half parry; my sleeve was pierced, and I felt the cold steel touch my arm, but I was not wounded. I was filled with anger at the sight, and instead of remaining on the defensive I attacked in my turn; I forgot that he was Rosette's brother, and I went at him as if he had been my mortal enemy. Profiting by a false position of his sword, I lunged in such close flanconnade that I struck him in the side. He uttered a "Ho!" and fell backwards.

I thought he was dead, but in reality he was only wounded, and his fall was due to a false step which he made while trying to retire. I cannot describe to

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you, Graciosa, the sensations I felt. Of course it is not difficult to conclude that if you lunge at flesh with a fine, sharp point, you will make a hole in it and the blood will come out; nevertheless, I was thunderstruck when I saw a red stream run down Alcibiades' doublet. I do not suppose I had fancied that sawdust would come out, as out of the ripped-up stomach of a doll, but I know that I never in my life felt such great surprise, and it seemed to me as if something incredible had just happened. What was really incredible was not that blood should flow from the wound, but that the wound should have been dealt by me, and that a girl of my age — I was going to write a young fellow — should have overcome a vigorous soldier well used to sword-play such as was Alcibiades; and all this for the crime of seduction, and for having refused marriage with a very rich, and furthermore, a very charming woman!

I was really most painfully embarrassed, — the sister having swooned, the brother lying dead as I believed, and I myself not very far from fainting or dying like the one or the other. I clutched the bell-rope and rang fit to wake the dead, until the rope broke; and leaving Rosette, who was unconscious,

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and Alcibiades, whom I had ripped up, to explain matters to the servants and to the old lady, I marched straight to the stables.

The fresh air restored me at once. I led out my horse, saddled and bridled him myself; I made sure that the crupper was firm, that the bit was in good condition; I saw that the stirrups were of the same length, and tightened the girths by one hole. In a word, I saddled him completely, with a care that was somewhat strange at such a time, and with a coolness quite incomprehensible after a combat which had ended like this one.

I mounted my steed and traversed the park by a path I knew of. The branches of the trees, laden with dew, whipped my face and wetted me. One might have thought that the old trees were stretching out their arms to hold me back and preserve me for the love of their mistress. Had I been in another state of mind or slightly superstitious, I could have easily believed that they were so many phantoms trying to seize me and threatening me with their fists.

But I had no thoughts in my mind, — neither these nor any others. A leaden stupor, so deep that I was scarce conscious of it, weighed down on my brain

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like a helmet too small for me. It did indeed seem to me that I had killed some one somewhere about there, and that this was the reason why I was going. For the rest, I was horribly sleepy, either because of the lateness of the hour or because the violence of the emotions of the night had caused a physical reaction and bodily fatigue.

I reached a small postern gate which opened on the fields by a secret lock, which Rosette had shown me in our rides; I dismounted, touched the button, and pushed open the gate. I got into the saddle again, after leading my horse out, and sent him at a gallop until I came to the highroad to C——, which I reached in the grey dawn.

And such is the very faithful and very circumstantial history of my first love fortune and my first duel.

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XV

IT was five o'clock in the morning when I entered the city. The houses were beginning to wake up; the worthy natives showed behind the panes their kindly faces surmounted by pyramidal night-caps. At the sound of my horse's steps, which sounded upon the uneven and pebbly pavement, out of every skylight shot the big faces, singularly red, and the bosoms in their early morning undress, of the Venuses of the place, who made endless conjectures upon this most unusual apparition of a traveller in C—— at such an hour and in such a costume, — for I was very scantily dressed, and my appearance was, to say the least, suspicious. I made a little chap, whose hair was away down over his eyes and who put up his little dog-nose to contemplate me more comfortably, tell me of an inn. I gave him a few sous for his pains, and a right good cut with my riding-whip, which made him flee squeaking like a jay plucked alive.

I cast myself on a bed and slept soundly. When I awoke, it was three o'clock in the afternoon; yet

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I was scarcely thoroughly rested. And indeed, it was not too much, after a sleepless night, a love affair, a duel, and a very rapid, though most successful flight.

I was very anxious concerning Alcibiades' wound, but a few days later I was completely reassured on learning that it had had no dangerous consequences, and that he was fully convalescent. This news relieved me of a singular burden, for the thought of having killed a man worried me strangely, although it was a case of legitimate defence and done against my own will. I had not yet reached that sublime indifference to men's lives which I have since attained.

At C—— I had the pleasure of coming upon several young fellows with whom we had travelled. I became more intimate with them, and they introduced me into several pleasant houses. I was perfectly accustomed to my clothes, and the rougher and more active life which I had led and the violent exercise which I had taken had made me twice as robust as I formerly was. I went everywhere with these young scapegraces; I rode, hunted, and shared their orgies with them; for little by little I had trained myself to drink, and without equalling the Teutonic capacity of certain of them, I could manage to dispose

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of two or three bottles for my own share without being too tipsy, — a most satisfactory progress. As for swearing I had at my disposal an abundant wealth of variants of "by God," and I deliberately enough kissed the maids of the inns. In a word, I was an accomplished young gentleman, quite up to the latest pattern. I got rid of certain provincial ideas which I still entertained upon virtue and other such nonsense, and on the other hand, I became so prodigiously punctilious on the point of honour that I fought a duel almost every day. It had indeed become almost a necessity for me, a sort of indispensable exercise without which I should not have felt well the whole day long; so, when no one had looked at me or trodden on my toe, when I had no reason to fight, then, rather than remain idle and not use my hands, I would serve my comrades as second, or I would even act in that capacity for people whom I knew by name only. I soon acquired a colossal renown for bravery, and nothing less was needed to stop the jokes which my beardless face and my effeminate air would undoubtedly have provoked; but three or four additional buttonholes which I made in doublets, and some strips of skin which I most delicately ripped up on a few recalcitrant

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people caused me to be generally thought to look more virile than Mars or Priapus themselves, and you could have met with people who were ready to swear that they had stood godfathers to bastards of mine.

With all that apparent dissipation, with all that wasteful, absurd way of life, I nevertheless followed out my original idea, — that is, the conscientious study of man and the solution of the problem of the perfect lover; a problem rather more difficult to solve than that of the philosopher's stone. There are certain ideas which resemble the horizon; it undoubtedly exists, since you see it in front of you whichever way you turn, but it retires obstinately before you, and, whether you walk or whether you gallop, it is always at the same distance, for it can only show under a given condition of distance. It disappears as you advance, to reappear farther away with its fleeting, never-to-be-grasped azure, and it is in vain that you try to stop it by clutching the hem of its floating mantle.

The more I got to know the beast, man, the more I perceived how impossible was the realisation of my wish, and how completely what I required in order to love happily was beyond the bounds of its nature. I became convinced that the man who would be most

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sincerely in love with me would find a way, though with the best will in the world, to make me the most wretched of women; and yet I had already parted with many of my exigencies as a maiden; I had come down from the lofty clouds, not quite into the street and the gutter, but to a hill of moderate height, accessible though somewhat steep. The ascent, it is true, was rather hard, but I was conceited enough to believe that I was well worth making the effort, and that I would be a sufficient compensation for the trouble which would be taken. I could never have made up my mind to take a single step to meet my lover; I waited patiently upon my summit.

Here was my plan. Under my man's apparel I proposed to get acquainted with some young fellow whose appearance took my fancy; to live on familiar terms with him; by skilful questions and false confidences to provoke genuine ones, and thus soon to come to know thoroughly his feelings and his thoughts; then, if I found him what I wished him to be, I would leave on some pretended trip, and keep away from him for three or four months to give him a little time to forget my features. Returning dressed as a woman, I would have fitted up in some retired quarter a volup-

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tuous little house hidden in trees and flowers; next, so managed matters that he would meet me and call on me; and finally, if his love proved true and faithful, I would give myself to him without restriction and without precaution. I should have considered it an honourable title to be called his mistress, and I should not have asked him to call me anything else.

Undoubtedly that plan will not be carried out, for it is of the essence of plans which one makes that they are not carried out, and herein are chiefly exhibited the frailty of the will and the true nothingness of man. The proverb, "What woman wills, God wills," is not a bit more true than any other proverb, — in other words, it is not true.

So long as I had seen men from afar only, and through the veil of my desire, they had seemed handsome to me. It was an optical illusion. Now I think them most hideous, and I cannot understand how any woman can bear to have a man in bed with her. As for me, it makes me sick to think of it, and I could never make up my mind to it. Their features are coarse and ignoble, lacking delicacy and elegance; the lines are broken and ungraceful! The skin, harsh, dark and wrinkled; sometimes tanned as if the owner

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had been hung for six months! They are ghastly, bony, hairy creatures with fiddle-strings on the backs of their hands, great feet like drawbridges, and a dirty moustache always full of food and curled up to the ears! Their hair is as rough as the bristles of a broom, and shining like a wild boar's; their lips are chapped and burned by strong drink, their eyes ringed with four or five dark circles, their necks full of twisted veins, big muscles, and prominent cartilage. Some are padded with red flesh and carry before them a corporation scarce held in by their belt. They wink their little sea-green eyes aflame with lust, and are more like hippopotami in breeches than human creatures. They alway stink of brandy or wine or tobacco, or of their natural smell, which is by far the worst of all. As for those whose outward form is somewhat less disgusting, they are like badly made women, that is all.

I had not noticed all that. I had gone through life as on a cloud, and my feet scarce touched the earth. The scent of the roses and the lilies of springtime went to my head like a heavy perfume. I dreamed only of accomplished heroes, faithful and respectful lovers, passion worthy of the altar, marvellous devotion

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and sacrifices, — and I expected to find all that in the first rascal that said good-day to me. However, that early coarse intoxication did not last long; strange suspicions entered into my mind, and I had no rest until I had cleared them up.

At first the horror which I felt for men was carried to the extreme of exaggeration, and I looked upon them as awful monstrosities. Their manners, their cynical language, their brutality, and their contempt for women shocked and revolted me beyond description, so thoroughly contrary to reality was the idea which I had formed of them. They may not be monsters, if you please, but they are very much worse, by my faith! They are excellent fellows of most jovial temper, who drink deep and eat hard; who will do you all sorts of services; clever, brave; good painters, good musicians, — fit for ever so many things, except, however, the single one for which they have been created, which is to be the male of the animal called woman, whom they do not in the least resemble either physically or morally.

At first I found it very difficult to disguise the contempt they inspired me with, but little by little I got accustomed to their mode of life. I felt no more hurt

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by the sarcasms they launched against women than if I had myself been of their sex. On the contrary, I indulged in very excellent hits myself, and the success they met with greatly flattered my pride. Unquestionably none of my comrades went as far as I did in the way of satires and jokes on this point. My perfect acquaintance with the subject gave me a great advantage; and besides the piquant turn which they possessed, my epigrams had an accuracy which was often lacking in theirs. For, although all the evil that is said of women is always true in some respect, it is nevertheless difficult for men to keep cool enough to rail at them properly, and very often love mingles with their invectives. I have noticed that it was those who were most tender and who best understood women, who treated them worse than any others, and who returned to the subject with peculiar bitterness, as if they bore them an eternal grudge for not being such as they wished them to be, and for having failed to come up to the good opinion which they had formed of them at the outset.

What I wanted, first and foremost, was not physical beauty or the beauty of the soul, but love; only, love, as I feel it, is perhaps not a human possibility. Never-

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theless, it seemed to me that that would be the way I should love, and that I would give in return more than I exact.

What splendid folly! what sublime prodigality! To give one's self up wholly, without keeping aught back; to renounce self-possession and free will, to submit one's will to another, to see only through his eyes, to hear through his ears, to be but one in two bodies, to mingle and confound souls so that you no longer know whether you are yourself or the other, to absorb and to give out continually, to be now the moon and now the sun, to have the whole world, the whole creation, centred in one being, to displace the centre of life and to be ready at any time for the greatest sacrifices and for the most complete self-devotion, to suffer on the breast of the beloved as if it were your own — oh, prodigy! to become twice yourself by giving yourself — that is love such as I conceive it.

As for being faithful like the ivy, clasping like the young vine, and cooing like the turtle-dove, that is a matter of course; these are the first and simplest conditions.

Had I remained at home in the dress of my sex, occupied in spinning in melancholy fashion, or em-

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broidering behind a pane in the embrasure of a window, what I have been looking for through the world would perhaps have come of itself to find me. Love is like fortune, it does not like to be run after. It prefers to visit those that have fallen asleep on the edge of a well, and often the kisses of queens and gods light upon closed eyes. It is an alluring but deceitful belief to fancy that all adventures and all happiness are to be found only in those places where you are not, and it is a mistake to have your horse saddled and to post off in quest of your ideal. Many people commit that mistake, many more will commit it. The horizon is always of the loveliest azure, although when you reach it the hills which form it are nothing but worn, cracked clay, or ochre washed by the rain.

I imagined that the world was full of adorable young fellows, and the roads crowded with Esplandians, Amadis, and Lancelots of the Lake in pursuit of their Dulcineas, and I was greatly amazed to find that the world troubled itself very little about that sublime pursuit, and was satisfied with the first woman that came along for a bedfellow. I have been severely punished for my curiosity and my imprudence; I am enlightened in the most horrible manner possible, without having

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had any enjoyment. In me knowledge has forestalled use, and there is nothing worse than those forced experiences which are not the fruit of action. The most thorough ignorance would be a hundred times better, — at least, you would commit many a mistake which would serve to instruct you and to rectify your thoughts; for under the disgust of which I spoke just now there is always a quick, rebellious element which causes the strangest disorders in me. My mind is convinced, but my body is not, and refuses to share in that proud disdain. My young, strong body plunges and kicks under the mind like a vigorous stallion ridden by a weak old man, whom, however, it cannot throw, for the martingale holds its head, and the bit tears its mouth.

Since I have been living with men I have seen so many women shamefully betrayed, so many secret intrigues imprudently divulged, the purest of love carelessly dragged through the mud, young men hastening to abominable courtesans as they leave the arms of the most charming mistresses, the firmest connections suddenly broken without plausible motive, that I can no longer make up my mind to have a lover. It would be leaping into the bottomless abyss in broad day with

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open eyes. Yet the secret desire of my heart is still to have a lover. The voice of nature drowns the voice of reason. I feel very well that I shall never be happy if I do not love and am not loved in return. But the pity of it is that you can have a man only for a lover, and if men are not quite devils, they are very far from being angels. It would be vain for them to stick feathers on their shoulders and to put a halo of gold paper around their heads. I know them too well to be taken in by them. All the fine speeches they could rattle off to me would make no impression. I know beforehand what they are going to say, and I could finish their sentences for myself. I have seen them studying their parts; I know their most effective tirades and the passages upon which they count. Neither the pallor of their faces nor the change in their features could convince me, — I know that all that means nothing. An orgy of a night, a few bottles of wine, and two or three girls are quite sufficient to get up one's face very nicely. I have seen this fine recipe practised by a young marquis, very rosy and blooming naturally, with whom it succeeded admirably, and who owed it solely to that touching pallor, so beautifully obtained, to have his love crowned. I know,

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too, how the most languorous of Celadons console themselves for the rigours of their Astræas, and find a means of being patient until the hour of love has struck; I have seen the slatterns who served as understudies to the chaste and prudish Ariadnes.

After these things, truth to tell, man does not tempt me much. For he has not beauty as women, — beauty, that splendid vestment which so thoroughly conceals the imperfections of the soul, that divine drapery cast by God over the nakedness of the world, and which, in a way, makes it excusable to love the vilest courtesan of the gutter if only she possesses the magnificent, regal gift. If I cannot have the virtues of the soul, I want at least the exquisite perfection of form, the satin flesh, the rounded contours, the suave lines, the soft skin, all that charms one in woman. Since I cannot have love, let me have, at least, voluptuousness, and replace the sister as well as I can by the brother. But all the men I see seem to me hideously ugly. My horse is a hundred times handsomer, and it would be far less repugnant to me to kiss it than to kiss certain fops who think themselves very attractive. Certainly popinjays such as I know many to be would not prove a very brilliant theme on which to embroider variations

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of pleasure. A soldier would not suit me very well either. Military men have something mechanical in their gait, something beastly in their faces, which makes me look upon them as scarcely human. Lawyers do not enchant me any more. They are dirty, oily, bristly, shiny, with lack-lustre eyes and lipless mouths. They smell abominably of staleness and rottenness, and I should not feel the least desire to place my face against their lynx or weasel muzzles. As for poets, they think of nothing in the world but the end of words, and go no farther back than the penultimate syllable; and the saying that it is difficult to make any use of them is a true one. They are more wearisome than others, but they are just as ugly, and have not the least distinction or elegance in their appearance or their clothes — which is really remarkable. People who are occupied the live-long day with form and beauty, and who do not perceive that their boots are badly made and their hats absurd! They look like country chemists or trainers of learned dogs out of work, and they are enough to disgust you with poetry and verse for many an eternity.

As for the painters, they also are frightfully stupid. They can see nothing beyond the seven colours. One

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of them, with whom I spent a few days at R——, and who was asked what he thought of me, made this ingenious reply: "He is of a rather warm tone in the shadows. You would have to use, instead of white, Naples yellow with a little Cassel earth and red brown." That was his opinion, — and furthermore, he had a crooked nose and squinted, which did not improve his case.

Whom, then, shall I take? A soldier, whose shirt-front sticks out; a lawyer with convex shoulders; a wild-eyed poet or painter; a little, thin, light-weight jackanapes? What cage shall I pick out in this menagerie? I really feel no more inclined in one direction than the other, for they are all as perfectly equal in stupidity and ugliness as it is possible to be. Then, of course, I might still do something else, — take some one whom I love, even were he a porter or a horse-dealer; but I do not care even for a porter.

Oh, unhappy heroine that I am! — unpaired turtle-dove, compelled to utter eternally mournful cooings! How often have I wished I really were the man I seem to be! How many women I have come across who could have understood me and whom I would have understood, whose hearts would have understood

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my heart. How perfectly happy those love-inspired, delicate attentions, those noble impulses of pure passion to which I could have responded, would have made me! What suavity, what delight! How freely would that sensitive plant, my soul, have bloomed without being obliged to contract and close every minute under a coarse touch! What a charming flora of invisible flowers that will never open, and the mysterious perfume of which would have softly filled the fraternal soul! It seems to me that that would have been an enchanting life, an infinite ecstasy, with wings ever outspread; strolls with hands clasped that never unclasp, along shaded walks strewn with golden sand, through groves of roses ever smiling, in parks full of ponds on which glide the swans, with alabaster vases standing out against the foliage.

If I had been a young man, how I should have loved Rosette, how I should have adored her! Our souls were indeed made the one for the other, — two pearls designed to melt into one and to be one forever. How perfectly I should have realised the ideal she had formed of love! Her character suited me admirably, her style of beauty pleased me. What a pity that our love was absolutely doomed to indispensable platonism!

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I met with an adventure lately. I called at a house where there was a charming young girl of some fifteen years at most. I have never seen a more adorable miniature. She was fair, but of such delicate and transparent fairness that ordinary fair women seem by her side terribly dark, black as moles. Her hair seemed to be gold powdered with silver. Her brows were of such a delicate, melting tint that they scarcely showed in outline. Her eyes, of the palest blue, had the most velvety glance and the silkiest lashes which you can possibly imagine. Her mouth, so small that you could not have put your finger in it, still further increased the childish and delicate character of her beauty, while the soft roundness and the dimples of her cheeks possessed inexpressibly ingenuous charm. The whole of her dear small person delighted me beyond expression. I loved her little, white, frail hands through which the daylight shone, her little birdlike foot that scarce touched the ground, her waist that a breath would have broken, and her pearly shoulders, still not fully formed, which her scarf, a little awry, so happily revealed. Her chatter, in which artlessness lent a piquancy to her natural wit, held me for hours at a time, and I took singular pleasure in making

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her talk. She said a thousand delightful, nonsensical things, sometimes with extraordinary cleverness of intention, sometimes without appearing to understand their meaning fully, which made them ever so much more attractive. I gave her sweets and pastilles, which I kept expressly for her in a box of light-coloured tortoise-shell. This pleased her greatly, for she is very fond of sweets, like a dear little kitten that she is. As soon as I arrived she would run to me and feel in my pockets to see if the blessed bon-bon box was there. I would make it pass from one hand to the other, and that led to a little battle in which she necessarily triumphed, and ended by pillaging me completely.

One day, however, she merely bowed to me very gravely, and did not come as usual to see if the fountain of sweets was springing as ever in my pocket. She remained proudly upon her chair, upright, and her elbows well in.

"Well, Ninon," said I, "have you taken to liking salt, or are you afraid that the sweets will make your teeth fall out?" And as I said this I rapped the box, which gave out under my vest the most honeyed and sugary sound possible.

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She put out her little tongue to the tip of her lips, as if to enjoy the ideal delight of the absent sweets, but she did not move. Then I drew the box from my pocket and began to swallow carefully the particular sweets which she loved above all. The instinct of gormandise was for a moment stronger than her resolve. She held out her hand to take some, but drew it back at once, saying, "I am too grown up now to eat sweets." And then she sighed.

"I had not observed that you had grown very much since last week. You must be like the mushrooms that spring up in a single night. Come here and let me measure you."

"You may laugh as much as you please," she replied with a charming pout, "I am no longer a little girl, and I mean to go on growing up."

"That is an excellent resolve, which you had better persevere in. And may I know, my young lady, wherefore these lofty ideas have come into your head, — for a week ago you seemed to think it very pleasant to be a little girl, and you ate up sweets without caring in the least whether you compromised your dignity."

My little friend looked at me with a strange air, cast a glance around, and when she was quite certain that

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we could not be overheard she bent toward me in a mysterious fashion and said, "I have a lover."

"The devil you have! Now I am no longer surprised that you do not care for sweets. And yet you were wrong not to take some. You could have played with him that you were having a dinner party, or you could have exchanged them for a shuttlecock."

The child disdainfully shrugged her shoulders and looked at me as if she pitied me. As she still preserved her attitude of offended queen, I went on, "What is the name of that glorious personage? Arthur, I suppose, — or else Henry." These were two little boys with whom she was in the habit of playing, and whom she called her husbands.

"No, neither Arthur nor Henry," she said, fixing on me her clear, transparent eyes, — "a gentleman." She raised her hand above her head to give me an idea of his height.

"Is he as tall as that? Why, this is becoming serious. Who is this tall lover, then?"

"Mr. Theodore, I do not mind telling you, but you must not mention it to any one, — neither to mamma nor Polly (her governess), nor to your friends, who think that I am only a child and who would laugh at me."

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I passed close to the house, she came out; I held out my hand to her, she put her foot upon the toe of my boot and sprang lightly on the crupper, for she was marvellously agile. I spurred my horse, and passing through seven or eight side streets, deserted at that time, I found means to return home without any one seeing us. I made her undress in order to put on her disguise, and I myself acted as her maid. She objected to it at first, and wished to dress herself alone, but I made her understand that this would waste a good deal of time and that, besides, as she was my mistress, there was nothing improper in it, and that it was always done between lovers. She would have been convinced by fewer reasons, and yielded to circumstances with the best grace in the world.

Her body was a little marvel of delicacy. Her arms, somewhat slight like those of any young girl, were inexpressibly suave in their outlines, and her nascent breasts were full of such charming promise that no bosom more developed could have borne the comparison. She still possessed all the grace of the child and yet had all the charm of the woman. She was at that adorable stage of transition from the little girl to the young girl, — a passing, inexpressible transition, a

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delightful moment when beauty is full of hope, and when each day, instead of taking something from your charms, adds new perfections to them.

Her costume became her admirably. It gave her a slightly impudent, but most interesting and amusing air, which made her laugh to tears when I held the mirror for her to judge of the effect of her dress. I then made her eat a few biscuits dipped in sherry so as to give her courage and enable her the better to bear the fatigue of the ride.

Our horses were waiting in the court. She mounted hers pretty resolutely; I bestrode the other, and off we went. Night had now completely fallen, and a few scattered lights which went out successively testified that the honest town of C—— was virtuously occupied in the way that every provincial town should be on the stroke of nine.

We could not go very fast, for Ninon was not much of a horsewoman, and when her horse began to trot she clung to its mane with all her strength. Nevertheless, the next morning we were far enough away not to be caught up with unless great speed were made. But we were not pursued, or if we were it was in a direction opposite to that we had taken.

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I became greatly attached to my little beauty. You were no longer with me, dear Graciosa, and I felt a mighty need of loving some one, of having with me a dog or a child to fondle. Ninon fulfilled that duty. She slept with me, and before falling asleep would throw her little arms around me. She conscientiously believed that she was my mistress, and in no wise suspected that I was not a man. Her great youth and her extreme innocence kept up this error, which I took very good care not to dispel. The kisses I bestowed on her thoroughly carried out her illusion, for her ideas did not go beyond that, and her desires were not yet active enough to make her suspect anything else. After all, she was but half mistaken. For, indeed, there is between herself and me the same difference that exists between a man and me. She is so diaphanous, so lissome, so light, of such a delicate and choice nature that she is a woman, even for me who am a woman, but who look like a Hercules beside her.

I am tall and dark, she is short and fair; her features are so soft that they cause my own to seem almost harsh and austere, and her voice is such a melodious warble that my own seems rough in comparison with

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hers. Any man who might possess her would break her to pieces, and I am always afraid that the wind will blow her away some fine morning. I wish I could shut her up in a box with cotton-wool and hang her around my neck. You cannot imagine, my dear friend, how charming and clever she is, how full of little fondling fashions and pretty, dainty ways. She is indeed the most adorable creature that ever lived, and it would have been a great pity had she remained with her unworthy mother.

I felt a malicious joy in thus stealing away this treasure from the rapacity of men. I was the dragon which prevented its being approached, and if I could not enjoy her myself, at least no one else should do so — which is always a consoling thought, whatever the fellows who speak against egotism may say.

It was my intention to keep her as long as possible in her state of ignorance, and to have her near me until she herself no longer wished to remain or until I managed to settle her life. I took her with me, in her youth's dress, on all my trips hither and thither. This sort of life was particularly agreeable to her, and the pleasure she found in it helped her to bear the fatigue. Everywhere I was complimented on the exquisite

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beauty of my page, and I have no doubt that many suspected the very opposite of the truth. A number even endeavoured to make sure for themselves, but I would not let my little girl speak to any one, and the curious were completely disappointed. Every day I discovered in this charming child some new quality which made me love her more, and caused me to congratulate myself on the resolution I had come to. Unquestionably, men were not worthy of possessing her, and it would have been a great pity that so charming a body and so charming a soul should have been given up to their brutal appetites and their cynical depravation.

A woman alone could love her delicately and tenderly enough. One side of my character, which could not have been developed in any other connection, and which came out through this one, is the need and the desire of protecting, which is usually a matter for men. I should have been extremely annoyed, had I taken a lover, at his assuming to defend me, because that is a care which I prefer to take with people whom I like, and my pride enjoys much more the leading part than the secondary one, although the secondary is more agreeable. So I was glad to be able to render to my

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dear little one all the attentions which I should have liked to receive, such as to help her on a rough ride, to hold her rein and her stirrup, to wait on her at table, to undress her, and to put her to bed, to defend her if any one insulted her, — in a word, to do everything for her that the most passionate and tender lover does for the mistress he adores.

Little by little I was losing consciousness of my own sex, and scarcely did I remember at long intervals that I was a woman. At first it often happened that I would thoughtlessly say something that did not agree with the dress I wore, but now it never occurs, and even when I write to you, who are the confidante of my secret, I sometimes use needlessly virile adjectives. If ever the fancy strikes me to go and pull my skirts out of the drawer in which I have left them, — which I do not believe, unless I fall in love with some handsome young fellow, — I shall have some difficulty in getting rid of this habit, and instead of being a woman disguised as a man, I shall look like a man disguised as a woman. The truth is that I belong to neither of these sexes. I have neither the idiotic submissiveness, the timidity, nor the meanness of a woman, nor have I the vices of a man, his disgusting crapulence, his

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brutal inclinations. I belong to a third or separate sex, as yet unnamed, higher or lower, more defective or superior. I have the beauty and the soul of a woman, the mind and the strength of a man; but I have too much or not enough of one and the other to be coupled with either of them.

Oh, Graciosa, never shall I be able to love entirely a man or a woman. There is something unappeasable which murmurs in me, and the lover or the friend corresponds to but one side of my character. If I had a lover, what there is of womanly in me would no doubt for a time overcome the virile side, but it would not last long, and I feel that I should be only half contented. If I have a female friend, the thought of carnal pleasure prevents me enjoying thoroughly the pure delight of the soul, so that I know not where to stop, and I hesitate constantly between one and the other.

I would like to be of either sex alternately in order to satisfy this double nature of mine, — a man to-day, to-morrow a woman. I should keep for my lovers my languorous tenderness, my submissive and devoted ways, my softest caresses, my gentle sighs whispered in melancholy manner, all that in my character partakes

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of the nature of the cat and the woman. Then, with my mistresses I should be enterprising, bold, passionate, with a domineering manner, my hat cocked on my ear, and the mien of a hectoring gentleman-adventurer. Then my whole nature would show out, and I should be perfectly happy; for true happiness is the capacity of developing freely in every direction, and of being everything that one can be.

But these are impossible things, and I must not think of them.

I had carried off the young girl with the hope of deceiving my inclinations and of turning upon some one all that vague tenderness which wells up in my soul and overflows it. I had taken her as a sort of safety valve for my hours of loving. But I soon recognised, in spite of all the affection which I felt for her, what an immense void, what a bottomless abyss she yet left in my heart, and how little her tenderest caresses satisfied me. I determined then to try a lover, but it was long before I met one who was not repulsive to me. I had forgotten to tell you that Rosette, having discovered whither I had gone, had written me a most beseeching letter, asking me to come and see her. I could not refuse, and I joined her in the country-house

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where she then was. I have returned there several times since, and even quite recently. Rosette, despairing at not having obtained me for her lover, had thrown herself into the whirl of society and into dissipation. Like all tender souls who are not chastely inclined and who have been disappointed in their first love, she had had a great many adventures in a short time, and the list of her conquests was already very long, for everybody had not the same reasons to resist her that I had.

She had with her a young gentleman called d'Albert, who was then her declared lover. I appeared to make a very strong impression upon him and he immediately developed a very lively friendship for me.

Although he treated her with much attention and had towards her a manner which was singularly tender, at bottom he did not love Rosette, — not from satiety or disgust, but rather because she did not come up to certain notions, true or false, which he had of love and beauty. A vaporous ideal interposed between her and him, and prevented his being as happy as he would have been but for that. Evidently he had never realised his dream, and he sighed after something unattained, but he did not look for it and remained faithful to bonds

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that weighed upon him. For he does possess a soul somewhat fuller of delicacy and honour than most men's, and his heart is far from being as corrupt as mine. Unaware that Rosette had never been in love with any one but myself, and still was so, in spite of her intrigues and her follies, he feared to afflict her by allowing her to see that he did not love her. This thought kept him back, and he sacrificed himself in the most generous way possible.

The style of my features pleased him extraordinarily, for he attaches importance to external appearance, — to such an extent, indeed, that he fell in love with me in spite of my masculine apparel and the formidable sword which I wear. I confess that I was grateful to him for his keen instinct, and that I felt some esteem for him because he had made me out under my deceitful dress. At the outset he thought himself endowed with a taste far more depraved than it really was, and I laughed inwardly at seeing him so tormented. Sometimes when he accosted me he wore so troubled a look that it amused me beyond expression, and the very natural inclination which drew him to me appeared to him a diabolical impulse which he could not fight against too hard. On such occasions he would turn

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furiously back to Rosette and try to resume more orthodox habits of love; naturally he came back to me more passionate than before. Then the luminous thought that I might well be a woman, after all, made its way into his mind. To convince himself of the fact, he began to observe and study me with the most minute attention. He must certainly know every separate hair on my head and exactly how many lashes there are on my eyelids. He examined, compared, analysed everything, — my feet, my hands, my neck, my cheeks, and the almost imperceptible down at the corner of my lips; and this investigation, in which the artist helped the lover, ended in proving to him as clear as day — when it is clear — that I was truly and really a woman, and furthermore his ideal, his type of beauty, the realisation of his dream — a marvellous discovery!

It then only remained for him to bring me to be kind and to induce me to present him with the gift of love, in order to make my sex perfectly plain. A play which we gave, and in which I performed a woman's part, finally decided him. I shot at him a few equivocal glances and made use of certain lines in my part which bore upon our situation, to embolden him and lead him to declare himself; for if I do not love him

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passionately, I like him well enough not to let him waste away for love; and as since my transformation he was the first who suspected that I was a woman, it was only right that I should enlighten him on this important point, and I was determined that he should not have the shadow of a doubt. He came several times to my room with a declaration of love on his lips, but he dared not speak it, — for I am bound to say that it is difficult to talk love to one who wears the same dress that you do, and who is trying on a pair of jack-boots. At last, unable to express himself by word of mouth, he wrote me a long letter, most Pindaresque in style, in which he explained at very great length what I knew a good deal better than he did.

I do not quite know what I ought to do. It would be outrageously virtuous either to grant his request or to reject it. Besides, he would be too deeply pained at being refused. If we make unhappy the people who love us, what are we to do to those who hate us? Perhaps it would be most proper to play the part of a cruel fair for some time, and to wait at least a month before undoing my tigress skin and appearing simply in my chemise. But since I have determined to yield to him, I may as well do it at once as later. I do not

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quite understand those fine defences, methodically graduated, which yield one hand to-day, to-morrow the other, then the foot, then the leg as far as the knee, up to and exclusive of the garter, and those intractable virtues which are always ready to pull down the bell-rope if you trespass by a single line beyond the ground they have resolved to let you traverse that day. It makes me laugh to see these methodical Lucretias, who walk backwards with the signs of the most maidenly terror, but from time to time cast a furtive glance over their shoulder to make sure whether the sofa on which they propose to sink is directly behind them or not. That is the sort of thing which I could not do.

I am not in love with d'Albert, — at least in the sense in which I take that word, — but I certainly like him and feel affection for him; I am pleased with his mind, and his person is not disagreeable to me. There are very few people of whom I can say as much. He has not everything, but he has something. What I like in him is that he does not seek to brutally satisfy himself like other men. He has a perpetual aspiration and a sustained desire for the beautiful; material beauty alone, it is true,

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but even that is a noble feeling, which suffices to maintain him in the higher regions. His conduct towards Rosette proves that his heart is upright, — an uprightness which is rarer than the other, if that is possible.

Then, — I must out with it, — I am possessed with the most violent desires. I languish and faint with voluptuousness; for the dress I wear, causing me to have all sorts of adventures with women, protects me too well against the schemes of men. A thought of pleasure never realised vaguely fills my mind, and that flat, colourless dream wearies and annoys me. There are so many women, living amid the chastest surroundings, who lead the life of prostitutes; and yet, by the most comical contrast, I remain as much of a chaste virgin as if I were Diana herself, amidst the most widespread dissipation and surrounded by the greatest debauchees of our times. Carnal ignorance unaccompanied by mental ignorance is the most wretched thing on earth. To prevent my body from posing proudly before my soul, I mean to soil it to the same extent, if — which I doubt — it is any more soiling than drinking and eating. In a word, I mean to know what a man is and the pleasure he can give. Since

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d'Albert has recognised my sex under my disguise, it is only right that he should be recompensed for his penetration. He was the first to guess that I am a woman, and I shall do my best to prove to him that his supposition was well founded. It would be very uncharitable to let him believe that he had merely a monstrous inclination.

So it is d'Albert, then, who shall resolve my doubts and give me my first lesson in love. All I have to do now is to bring the crisis about in true poetic fashion. I have a great mind not to reply to his letter, but to be very cold to him for a few days; then when I see him very sad and very desperate, cursing the gods, threatening creation, and looking at the wells to see if they are not too deep to cast himself therein, I shall withdraw like the fairy-tale heroine to the end of the hall, and I shall put on my vari-coloured dress, — that is, my Rosalind costume, for my feminine wardrobe is exceedingly small. Then I shall go to his room as proud as a peacock. I shall audaciously show what I usually conceal with the greatest care, and having but a small lace kerchief tied very low and very open, I shall say to him in the most pathetic tone that I can assume, " O most elegiac and perspicacious of young

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men, I am really and truly a young and maidenly beauty, who adores you into the bargain, and who asks nothing better than to give you pleasure, and herself too. Pray see if that suits you, and if you still have any scruples left, touch this, go in peace, and sin as much as you can."

Having ended this fine speech, I shall let myself fall half fainting in his arms, and while heaving melancholy sighs, I shall cleverly unhook my dress so as to be in the regulation costume, that is, half nude. D'Albert shall do the rest, and I hope that the next morning I shall know all those fine things which have troubled my brain so long, and while satisfying my curiosity, I shall have furthermore the pleasure of having made a man happy.

I also intend to go and pay Rosette a visit in the same costume, and show her that if I did not respond to her love, it was neither through coldness nor disgust. I do not mean that she shall have such a poor opinion of me, and she deserves, as well as d'Albert that I should throw off my incognito before her. What will she look like when I make this revelation? Her pride will be consoled, but her love will mourn.

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Good-bye, my truest and best. Pray Heaven that the pleasure I seek may not appear to me as small a matter as those who dispense it. I have made fun all the time while writing this letter, and yet what I am about to try is a serious matter, which may affect the rest of my life.

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XVI

MORE than a fortnight had elapsed since d'Albert had placed his love-letter on Theodore's table, and yet nothing seemed changed in the manner of the latter towards him. D'Albert knew not to what cause to attribute this silence. It seemed as though Theodore had never received the letter. The wretched man thought it had been mislaid and lost; yet such an explanation was not very satisfactory, for Theodore had returned to the room a moment later, and it would have been very strange if he had not perceived a large paper placed by itself on the middle of a table so as to attract the most careless glance.

Was it that, after all, Theodore was really a man, and not a woman as d'Albert had imagined? Or, if she were a woman, did she feel for him such deep aversion, such great contempt, that she did not even deign to take the trouble to reply to him? The poor young man, who had not had, like ourselves, the luck to rummage in the portfolio of Graciosa, the fair Maupin's confidante, was not in a position to decide

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either affirmatively or negatively any of these important questions, and he remained sadly a prey to the most wretched indecision.

One evening he was in his room, his brow pressing hard against the pane, looking, without seeing them, at the chestnut trees in the park, which had lost much of their russet-coloured foliage. A heavy mist obscured the distance, and the night was falling grey rather than black, stepping cautiously with its velvet feet upon the tops of the trees. A great swan plunged and replunged amorously its neck and shoulders into the smoking water of the river, and its whiteness made it show in the darkness like a great star of snow. It was the single living being that somewhat enlivened the lonely landscape.

D'Albert was plunged in thoughts as melancholy as may come at five in the evening any time in foggy weather to a disappointed man, who for sole music has a rather sharp north wind, and for a view the skeleton of a leafless forest. He was thinking of throwing himself into the river, but the water struck him as very cold and very black, and he was only half persuaded by the swan's example. Then he thought of blowing out his brains, but he had neither pistols

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nor powder, and would have been very sorry to have had them; then of taking a new mistress, even of taking two, — a sinister resolve! but he knew no one who would satisfy him, or even who would not satisfy him. He was so desperate that he actually thought of taking up again women who were absolutely unbearable to him, and whom he had ordered his lackey to horsewhip out of the house. He ended by deciding on something still more atrocious: he decided to write another letter, — double-dyed fool that he was.

He had reached this point when he felt a hand light on his shoulder, just like a little dove alighting on a palm-tree. The comparison is rather weak, because d'Albert's shoulder did not much resemble a palm-tree. Never mind, we maintain it from sheer love of the East.

The hand was at the end of an arm, which came from a shoulder forming part of a body, which body was none else than Theodore-Rosalind, Mlle. d'Aubigny, or Magdalen de Maupin, — to give her her real name. You can fancy who felt surprised. Neither you nor I, for you and I have long expected this visit. It was d'Albert, who did not in the least expect it. He

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uttered a slight cry of surprise between an oh and an ah, yet I have the best reasons for believing that it was nearer ah than oh.

It was indeed Rosalind, so beautiful and so radiant that she lighted up the whole room, with her strings of pearls in the hair, her dress of shot-silk, her great lace cuffs, her red-heeled shoes, her splendid fan of peacock's feathers, — Rosalind, in short, as she appeared on the day of the play; only, there was an important and decisive difference. She had neither kerchief, lace, nor ruff, nor anything that might conceal from the glance those two lovely hostile twins, which, alas! but too often tend to be reconciled. Her bosom, absolutely bare, white, transparent like antique marble, of the most perfect and the most exquisite form, showed boldly out of a very low-cut bodice, and seemed to challenge the gaze. The sight was most reassuring, and d'Albert was very speedily reassured and confidently allowed himself to indulge in the wildest emotions.

"Well, Orlando, do you not recognise your Rosalind?" said the beauty, with the most winning smile, "or have you left your love hung up with your sonnets on some of the trees of the forest of Arden?

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I am very much afraid that you are really cured of the love-sickness for which you begged a cure of me with so much insistence."

"Oh, no, Rosalind, I am more love-sick than ever. I am dying — I am dead — or at least, not far from it."

"You are not badly set up for a dead man, and many a living one does not look as well as you do."

"What a week I have spent! You cannot imagine it, Rosalind. I hope that it will save me a few years of purgatory, at least, in the next world. But if I may dare to ask you, why did you not reply to me sooner?"

"Why, I do not quite know, unless it was *because*. If that reason does not seem to you a sound one, there are three others less good, and you can choose from them: First, because, carried away by your passion, you forgot to write legibly, and it took me more than a week to make out what you were talking about in your letter. Next, because my maidenly modesty could not bring itself in less time to such an absurd notion as that of taking a dithyrambic poet for a lover. And then, because I was not sorry to see whether you would blow out your brains, or poison your-

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self with opium, or hang yourself with your garter. That is why."

"How wicked it is! I can tell you, you were right to come to-day; you might not have found me to-morrow."

"Indeed, poor fellow! Do not look so mournful, or I shall become sentimental too, and more stupid than all the animals that were in the ark with the late Noah. If I were to let loose the flood of my sentimentality, you would be submerged by it, I warn you. Just now I gave you three poor reasons; now I offer you three good kisses. Do you accept — on condition that you will forget the reasons after the kisses? I owe you that much and a good deal more."

As she uttered these words, the fair infanta advanced towards the doleful lover and threw her beautiful arms around his neck. D'Albert kissed her warmly on both cheeks and on the lips. This kiss lasted much longer than the others, and was worth any other four. Rosalind saw that all she had done hitherto was mere childishness. Having paid her debt she sat down upon d'Albert's knee, still very much moved, and passing her fingers through his hair, she said to him, —

"All my cruelties are exhausted, my gentle friend.

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I utilized this past fortnight to satisfy my native ferocity, — I will confess to you that it seemed very long to me. Do not be conceited because I am frank; but it is true. I give myself into your hands — avenge yourself for my past rigours. If you were a fool, I would not say this to you, — and indeed, I would not say anything else to you, for I am not fond of fools. It would have been very easy to make you believe that I was dreadfully shocked at your feelings, and that all your platonic sighs and your most refined euphuisms would not have been enough to win you forgiveness for a thing that I was very glad to have happen. I might, like other women, have long refused you and given you in detail what I grant you freely and at once; but I do not believe that you would therefore have loved me a single little bit more. I ask of you neither promise of eternal love nor any exaggerated protests. Love me as long as the heart will let you, and I will do as much. I will not call you a perfidious wretch when you cease to love me. You also will be kind enough to spare me the odious corresponding titles if I happen to leave you. I shall have been merely a woman who has loved you — nothing more. There is no necessity why two people should

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hate each other for the rest of their lives because they have spent a night or two together. Whatever happens and wherever fate may take me, I swear to you this much—and it is a promise which may be kept—to have always a delightful remembrance of you, and if I am no longer your mistress, to be your friend, as I have been your comrade. To-night I have doffed for you my man's apparel; I shall resume it to-morrow for everybody. Remember that I am Rosalind at night only, and that during the livelong day I am, and can be, none else than Theodore de Sérannes —"

The sentence she was about to utter was lost in a kiss, followed by very many more, the number of which could not be reckoned, and the accurate enumeration of which I shall not attempt because it would certainly be rather long, and perhaps very immoral for certain people; for, as far as we are concerned, there is nothing more moral and more sacred under heaven than the caresses of a man and a woman when they both are young and handsome.

As d'Albert's attentions became more tender and more vivacious, Theodore's fair face, instead of being blooming and radiant, assumed an expression of proud melancholy, which caused her lover some uneasiness.

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"Why, my dear queen, do you look as chaste and serious as the Diana of antiquity, when you ought rather to have the smiling lips of Venus rising from the sea?"

"Because, d'Albert, I am more like the huntress than any one else. When quite young I assumed man's apparel, for reasons which it would be useless to tell you; besides, it would take too long. You alone have guessed my real sex, and if I have made conquests they have been women only; very superfluous conquests, which have caused me much embarrassment more than once. Indeed, incredible and ridiculous as it may seem, I am still a virgin, — as virgin as the snows of the Himalayas, as the moon before it slept with Endymion; and I am serious, as any one would be, who is about to do something which cannot be recalled. I am about to undergo a metamorphosis, a transformation, going to change from maid to woman, to be unable to-morrow to give what I had yesterday. There is something I do not know and which I am going to learn, an important leaf is going to be turned in the book of my life. That is why I look so sad, my friend, and not because of anything which you have done."

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As she said these words, she parted with her fair hands the long locks of the young man and touched his pale brow with her soft lips.

D'Albert, deeply moved by the sweet and solemn way in which she spoke this long speech, took her hands and kissed each individual finger, one after another; then he very gently broke the lacing of her dress, so that the bodice flew open and the two white treasures appeared in all their splendour. On those breasts, brilliantly fair like silver, bloomed the two fair roses of Paradise. He softly pressed the rosy nipples with his lips, and in similar fashion followed the entire contour. Rosalind lent herself to his caresses with inexhaustible willingness, and tried to return them as exactly as possible.

"No doubt you think me very awkward and cold, dear d'Albert; but I am not versed in this sort of thing. You will have much to teach me, and it is a troublesome task I have set you."

D'Albert replied in the best possible way: that is, he did not reply at all, and clasping her in his arms with renewed vehemence, he showered kisses upon her bare shoulders and breasts. The hair of the half-swooning fair fell down; her dress slipped to her feet

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as if by enchantment. She remained standing like a white apparition, with nothing on but a chemise of the most transparent linen. The happy lover knelt and speedily sent the two pretty red-heeled shoes flying each to a different corner of the room, the clocked stockings following fast upon them.

The chemise, filled with a happy spirit of imitation, did not remain far behind the dress: first it slipped from off the shoulders without an attempt being made to prevent it, then, profiting by a moment when the arms hung limp, it left them most cleverly and fluffed down to the hips, the roundness of which half stopped it. It was then that Rosalind noticed the treacherousness of her sole remaining garment and raised her knee slightly to prevent its falling altogether. Thus posed, she was the perfect reproduction of those marble statues of goddesses, whose intelligent drapery, annoyed at being made to conceal so many charms, regretfully envelops the thighs, and, through a fortunate disappointment, stops exactly above the spot it is destined to conceal. But Rosalind's chemise, not being of marble and not being held up by its folds, continued its triumphal descent and fell in a round heap at its mistress's feet, where it lay like a great white greyhound.

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There was of course, a very simple way of preventing all this disorder, which was to clutch the falling garment with the hand; but this very natural idea did not occur to our modest heroine.

So she remained unveiled, — her fallen garments forming a sort of pedestal, — in all the diaphanous splendour of her lovely nudity, under the soft light of an alabaster lamp that d'Albert had lighted.

He contemplated her as one dazzled and ravished.

"I am cold," said she, crossing her arms on her bosom.

"One moment more, I beseech you!"

Rosalind uncrossed her arms, rested the tip of her fingers upon the back of an arm-chair, and remained motionless. She leaned slightly upon one hip in a way that brought out the full richness of its undulating lines. She seemed in no wise embarrassed; the quickened beating of her heart alone caused the contour of her left breast to tremble somewhat.

The young enthusiast of beauty could not gaze sufficiently upon the sight before him, and we are bound to say, to the credit of Rosalind, that this time the reality surpassed his dream, and that he did not experience the least disappointment.

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The beautiful body that posed before him combined everything: delicacy and strength, colour and form, the lines of a Greek statue of the finest period of the art with the tone of a Titian. He beheld, tangible and concrete, the vague chimera he had so often endeavoured to stay in its flight; he was not compelled, as he had complained so bitterly to his friend Silvio, to restrict his glances to a given fairly well-made part and not allow them to wander beyond it, lest he should see something frightful; his lovelit eye descended from the head to the feet and travelled back from the feet to the head, ever caressing a perfect and harmonious form.

The knees were admirably well shaped, the ankles admirably turned and lissome, the legs and thighs modelled in firm and splendid fashion, the belly shone like an agate, the hips were supple and broad, the bosom was fit to call the gods from on high for the sake of kissing it, the arms and shoulders perfect in shape. A flood of beautiful brown hair, slightly wavy, such as is seen on heads by old masters, fell in waveletts down an ivory white back, the fairness of which it brought out still more strongly.

Once the artist was satisfied, the lover resumed the upper hand; for however devoted to art one may

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be, there are things that one cannot be long satisfied with merely gazing upon. He caught up his beauty in his arms and bore her to the bed. In the twinkling of an eye he was himself undressed and sprang in beside her.

The girl pressed close to him and clasped him in her arms, for her breasts were as cold as the snow whose whiteness they rivalled. The contact of this cool skin inflamed d'Albert still more and excited him to the highest point. Soon she was as hot as he. He lavished on her the maddest and most ardent of caresses — on her bosom, her shoulders, her neck, her arms, her feet; he wished that he could cover in one great kiss that lovely form that almost melted into his, so close was their embrace. Amid that profusion of exquisite charms he did not know which to caress first.

There were no longer any intervals between their kisses, and Rosalind's perfumed lips made but one mouth with those of d'Albert. Their bosoms rose and swelled; their eyes were half closed; their arms, inert through excess of pleasure, could no longer clasp each the other's body.

Rosalind had capacity for learning, and made the most rapid progress in that single night. The physi-

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cal ignorance that everything amazed, joined to a corruption of the mind that nothing surprised, formed the most piquant and delightful of contrasts. D'Albert was ravished, transported with delight, overjoyed, and wished the night would last forty-eight hours, like that in which Hercules was conceived. Towards morning, however, spite of innumerable kisses, caresses, and fondlings, the most amorous that can be imagined, and well calculated to keep him wide-awake, he was compelled to take some rest. A gentle and voluptuous slumber brushed his eyes with the tip of its wings; his head sank down and he fell asleep on the bosom of his lovely mistress. She looked at him for a time with an air of deep and melancholic reflection; then, as the dawn sent its pale rays through the curtains, she raised him gently, laid him down again by her side, sat up and climbed lightly over him.

She picked up her garments, dressed quickly; then returned to the bedside, bent over the still sleeping d'Albert, and kissed his two eyes on their long and silky lashes. Thereafter she withdrew, walking backwards and still looking at him.

Instead of returning to her room, she entered Rosette's. What she did and said there I have never

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been able to learn, though I have conscientiously endeavoured to do so. I have found nothing in the papers of Graciosa, or in those of d'Albert or Silvio that referred to that visit.

It was fully noon when Theodore emerged from Rosette's chamber. He did not appear at either dinner or supper, and neither d'Albert nor Rosette manifested any surprise at the fact. He went to bed very early, and the next morning, at dawn, without informing any one, he saddled his own horse and that of his page, and left the house, telling the footman that he would not be back to dinner and might not return for a few days.

D'Albert and Rosette were amazed beyond description, and knew not to what cause to attribute this sudden disappearance. Towards the end of the week the unhappy and disappointed lover received a letter from Theodore which we shall transcribe. I greatly fear it will not satisfy my readers of either sex; but, in truth, the letter was as I give it and not otherwise, and this glorious novel shall have no other conclusion.

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XVII

YOU are no doubt greatly surprised, my dear d'Albert, at what I am doing, after what I have done. Well, you have reason to be so. I wager that you have already applied to me at least a score of those epithets which we had agreed to strike from our vocabulary, — perfidious, inconstant, weak, — have you not? At least you will not call me either cruel or virtuous; that is so much to the good. You are cursing me, but you are wrong. You desired me, you loved me, I was your idol. Very good! I granted you at once what you wanted. It is your own fault if you did not obtain it sooner. I most complacently incarnated your dream. I have given you what I shall certainly not give again to any one, — a surprise on which you scarcely reckoned and for which you certainly ought to be more grateful. Now that I have satisfied you, I choose to go away. What is there so monstrous in that?

You have possessed me wholly and unreservedly for a whole night. What more do you want? Another night, and still another; you would even add the days

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at need. And so you would go on until you were tired of me. Oh, I can hear you protest most gallantly that I am not one of those of whom men tire. Why not of me just as much as of others?

It would last six months, two years, — ten years if you like; but everything has an end, and you would keep me because you would feel, in a way, that that was the right thing to do, or because you would not have the strength of mind to go. What is the use of waiting until we get to that point?

Then I might perhaps have ceased to love you. I have found you charming; perhaps by dint of seeing you I might come to think you detestable. Forgive me this suspicion. Living with you in the closest intimacy, I no doubt should have had an opportunity of seeing you with a night-cap on, or in some ridiculous or comical domestic situation. You would necessarily have lost the romantic and mysterious aspect which, more than anything else, seduces me, and once I understood your character better it would not have seemed to me so strange. I should have been less concerned about you, having you near me, very much as is the case with books which are never opened because they happen to be in one's library.

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Your nose — or your mind — would have ceased to seem to me as well turned. I should have noticed that your coat did not fit you, and that your stockings were not drawn tight. I should have experienced innumerable disappointments of this kind, which would have made me suffer greatly; and finally I should have come to the conclusion that you really were heartless and soulless, and that I was fated never to be loved by any one who understood me.

You adore me, and I adore you too. You have not the least reproach to make to me, and I have not the least reason to complain of you. I remained perfectly faithful to you during the whole duration of our amour. I deceived you in nothing; I have neither a false bosom nor a false virtue. You were so exceedingly good as to say that I was even more beautiful than you had imagined. In return for the beauty I gave you, you gave me much pleasure. We are quits. I am going my way and you are going yours. It may be we shall meet at the end of the play. Cherish this hope while you live.

You think, perhaps, that I leave you because I do not love you. By and by you will find this to be true, — that I would have stopped if I had thought

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less highly of you, and I would have made you drink the tasteless draught to the dregs. Your love would soon have been killed by weariness. At the end of a certain time you would have completely forgotten me, and on coming across my name on the list of your conquests, you would have asked yourself, "Who the devil was she?" I have at least the satisfaction of thinking that you will remember me more than any one else. Your unsatisfied desire will still spread its wings to fly to me. I shall always be for you something desirable, to which your fancy, your love will return; and I hope that in the arms of the mistresses whom you may have in the future, you will sometimes think of that one and only night you spent with me.

Never will you be more loving than you were on that blessed night; and even if you were to be as loving, you would then already be less so, for in love, as in poetry, to reach the same point only is to go back. You will be wise to be satisfied with this impression. You have rendered difficult the task of the lovers I may have — if I do have other lovers; and no one shall make me forget you. All will be merely the heirs of Alexander.

If the loss of me is too great a grief for you, burn

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this letter, which is the sole proof that you possessed me, and you will then believe you dreamed a fair dream, — why should you not? The vision vanished before dawn, at that hour when dreams return home through the horn or the ivory gate. How many men there are who, less fortunate than you, have not been able to kiss their chimera even once! I am neither capricious nor crazy nor prudish. My action is the result of deep conviction, — it is not through calculated coquetry and to inflame you still more that I leave C——. Do not try to follow me or to find me. You would fail, for I have taken too good care to conceal from you where I have gone. You shall always be for me the man who introduced me to a world of new sensations, — that is a thing a woman does not forget easily. Although absent, I shall think often of you, oftener than if you were by me.

Do your best to console poor Rosette, whom my departure must grieve at least as much as it grieves you. Love each other warmly, in remembrance of me whom you have both loved, and whisper my name sometimes as you exchange kisses.

THE END

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